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# THE VICTORIAN AFTERMATH

BOOKS BY  
E. WINGFIELD-STRATFORD

*The Victorian Trilogy*

THE VICTORIAN TRAGEDY

THE VICTORIAN SUNSET

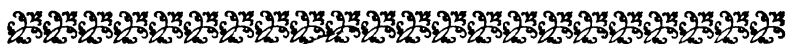
THE VICTORIAN AFTERMATH

*and*

THE HISTORY OF BRITISH CIVILIZATION

THEY THAT TAKE THE SWORD

ETC.



# THE VICTORIAN AFTERMATH /

1901—1914

By

ESMÉ WINGFIELD-STRATFORD

D.Sc., M.A.

LONDON

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To

CAPTAIN B. H. LIDDELL HART

In Token of Friendship and Admiration





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## INTRODUCTION

It is with some diffidence that I venture upon even the briefest introduction to the trilogy of which this is the concluding, though independent, volume. The historian who expounds his own philosophy risks coming under the same condemnation as the novelist who draws his own moral. I can only plead that I have been urged to do so by critics, on both sides of the Atlantic, whose authority it would be impertinent to disregard.

If I may be permitted to refer to a most helpful and suggestive criticism of *The Times Literary Supplement*, the demand is that I should pronounce a definite verdict on the age I have been depicting, and state the social and political philosophy on which it is based.

There is one danger in such a course of which my critic is no doubt aware. How many consciously philosophic historians have stood inviolate against the temptation of jamming their facts into a prepared framework of theory? The historian is a story-teller first and a philosopher afterwards. The moral should emerge from the tale—he who writes the tale to point a moral is on a par with the doubtless legendary Jesuit who tells lies in the cause of Truth. It is the historian's first duty to follow the facts without the faintest preconceived prejudice, wherever they may lead. So far from joining in Mr. Aldous Huxley's praise of Lytton Strachey's exquisite rightness in adding "a stroke or two to the portrait of his own contriving" to deepen the absurdity of a caricature, he will bear in mind that Clio, that stoic among the Muses, exacts from her servants that they shall sink even the artist in the truth-seeker.

## INTRODUCTION

The history of Victorian and Edwardian England is essentially that of Western civilization in its latest and, not impossibly, its final phase. It was England that led the way in the conquest of matter by machine-power, England that became not only the workshop, but, at one time, the envy and to some extent the pattern of a world feverishly in process of mechanization. As indisputably as the eighteenth century belongs to France, so does the nineteenth to England. Her triumph and her failure, such as they were, were shared by that portion of the human species that, not by meekness, but by power, had come nigh to inheriting the earth. To all vital intents and purposes, England may therefore be regarded as the microcosmos of *Homo Sapiens*.

Civilized man may be compared to a patient who, after a long course of high living and shallow thinking, has had a sudden and almost fatal stroke. He has now so far recovered as to be up and about his normal avocations, but his health is far from restored, and has lately declined to a state approaching collapse. The symptoms that preceded the last stroke are only too plainly repeating themselves—that tell-tale flush is darker and angrier than in 1914. But so far from being warned by his last experience, the patient has not only gone back to his old courses, but has plunged into orgies of an extravagance beyond the wildest of his former dreams. Substitute new Fascism for old Prussianism, and the Ogpu for the Black Hundreds, and the analogy will be clear.

The present trilogy ends with the hour of the patient's first stroke. It aims at furnishing one aspect of a case history, on the basis of which a diagnosis may be arrived at. But, my critics ask, what is my own diagnosis? Though I cannot think that an answer is essential, I will do my best to give mine, for what it is worth.

Let me start from one fundamental assumption

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about the nature of all life, animal and vegetable no less than human. Life is a perpetual endeavour of the creature to adapt itself to environment. When environment changes and adaptation is successful, there is progress. When environment changes too fast or too abruptly for adaptation to keep pace with it, there is extinction.

We have no reason to believe that Man, by acquiring discourse of reason or lordship of the earth, has obtained exemption from a necessity that has been laid on all living creatures. History is strewn with the wreckage of civilizations that have failed to adapt themselves—failed, that is to say, to produce minds of the requisite wisdom or resource—and consequently gone under. Whether so unprecedented a catastrophe as the collapse of our present civilization, which has conquered or infected the whole world, would be followed by any rebuilding, or whether it would represent the definite failure of the human experiment, may be open to debate. But he would be rash indeed who would stake his hopes for the species on the chance of its muddling through, ultimately, in some unforeseen way.

It is from this standpoint that I have surveyed the Victorian Age and its aftermath. Only here a new and unprecedented factor has been introduced by Man himself into his age-long problem of adaptation. Not content with allowing his environment to transform itself in its own way and at its own pace, he has taken to himself the power of transforming it on a vast scale and with headlong rapidity. At the dawn of this age, we find him in the full swing of an Industrial Revolution, a transformation of his whole environment and conditions of life. That transformation has been going on at an accelerating pace ever since. The Victorians themselves already seem as distant to us as the Elizabethans did to them.

Unless the assumption from which we started is

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baseless, or unless, by some miracle, Man has been exempted from the law of all life, there was no escape, in the Victorian Age, from the necessity of a mental and spiritual revolution corresponding to that other revolution of environment. The penalty for failure could be none other than that which has overtaken every other defaulting species and civilization. For a few brief decades that penalty might be delayed, but evaded it could not be.

It would be false to say that the Victorians made no attempt whatever to meet the challenge of their environment. It was something that they should have made the real Victorian Age, which comprises the four mid decades of the nineteenth century, into one of the most brilliant periods of history. But they misconceived the nature and gravity of their task. The Victorian Tragedy, described in the first volume of this series,<sup>1</sup> is that of their failure to get to the root of any one of the main problems before them. In that book I likened the edifice of their civilization to William Beckford's splendid mansion at Fonthill, with its staggering proportions and lavish ornamentation, but without foundations—so that the whole thing ere long toppled in ruin. The Victorian Age was, to adopt a phrase of its own prophet, one of shams—its religion, its morality, its social system, whatever it had of philosophy, were the supports of a spiritual Fonthill, under the protection of a vast decency that forbade any probing into foundations or examination of fissures.

In *The Victorian Sunset*, which continues the story to the end of the reign, we see how these supports rotted or crumbled away. There was now no longer any pretence about foundations; the cracks were visible and increasing. Yet the building stood, in all its outward magnificence. While it continued to stand, its dwellers threw themselves with a feverish

<sup>1</sup> In America, *Those Earnest Victorians*.

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zest into the enjoyment of what time they had left. They called for madder music and for stronger wine. They abandoned all thought of reconstruction. Waving their paper Union Jacks, and with an occasional sunflower in their buttonholes, they went mafficking down the primrose path to the strains of *Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay*. It was a reckless and frivolous time, this of the *fin de siècle*, fraught with tragic absurdity, and yet not without a certain fantastic charm.

In the present volume we see how the crash came—understand how it was bound to come. For the measureless catastrophe, whose beginning was the pistol shot at Serajevo and whose end may yet be the collapse of our civilization, is but the culmination, and in a sense the meaning, of the Victorian Tragedy. The title, *The Victorian Aftermath*, is, to my mind, one that just comprehends the significance of those thirteen and a half years that followed the Queen's death.

To those extreme sceptics who see in all that has come upon us the blind workings of chance, and hold that if such and such casual things had been done or left undone the War and all its consequences might have been averted, it is only possible to reply, in words once used by the Duke of Wellington, "If you can believe that, you can believe anything." To most who study or remember those pre-War years, the astonishing thing is that the catastrophe should have hung fire as long as it did. It was there, as palpably as the storm when the air is thunder-charged with electricity and the trees have begun to sway in the path of its approach. If I may venture to cite an experience of my own, it is only because I believe that there are scores of others who have recollections of the same kind. There comes back, out of that last midsummer of the peace, the memory of a dawn stealing up the Thames from Blackfriars to Westminster, and of the almost agonizing certainty of this being almost the last we should know of the old

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care-free civilization. Something was coming, palpably imminent. . . .

If we may accept the Hindu philosophy, nothing that ever happens to us is the result of chance, but is the Karma of our past actions working itself to fulfilment. Its coming is never from without but always from within, and it is not to be wondered at that in moments of heightened vision we should be conscious of its presence. Looked at in this light, much that seems incredible or fantastic is seen to fit into its place as if by necessity. To explain so measureless a catastrophe, no ordinary lapse will suffice. Or, to revert to the standpoint of the evolutionist, the failure of the creature to adapt itself to environment must have been of tragic completeness.

It is therefore as much beside the point to justify Victorian civilization by the imposing dignity of the crinoline age or the glittering prosperity of the *fin de siècle*, as it would have been to have enlarged upon the glories of Fonthill before the crash came, or on the high time the patient was having a week before the stroke.

I am aware that a plain, unvarnished account of the years immediately preceding the War reads rather like the chronicle of a vast asylum, even though the proceedings may appear sane and reasonable compared with what is going on to-day. But to those critics who would condemn the story out of hand, as a grotesque libel, I would offer the suggestion that had things been otherwise, what followed would have been wholly unaccountable. A healthy vine does not ordinarily assume the properties of a upas tree. If a number of prosperous gentlemen were to start cutting each others' throats, and wrecking all the luxurious furniture of their common abode, we might fairly assume that when, ten minutes before, they had sat politely glaring at each other and fingering their knives, they were not quite right in the head.



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If the facts have been doctored, it is by those who must needs force or pervert them into the framework of a conventional story. They are no doubt wise in their generation. As we draw near to our own time, every prominent figure, every institution and event, is charged with its proper emotional value. To give a perfectly truthful account of the political game in a country the majority of whose inhabitants are loyal supporters of one or the other team, is to run with eyes open against an invincible barrier of prejudice. In the greater part of Europe, already, the writing of any history but propagandist falsehood is persecuted as treason, and its publication impossible. Even in lands less nakedly barbarized, it is the way of prudence to tread on no toes and arouse no hostile reactions, to give to every Panjandrum his prescribed meed of honour, to take serious things with becoming seriousness, and to accept words—Christianity, for instance, or Liberal, or Science—at their market currency. That way is easy to tread, and to follow it is to ensure a reputation for taste and soundness. But at its end lies a history that is at its academic best an unprofitable bore, and at its popular worst ranks among the most insidious forms of mental poison.

Though I dare not hope to steer clear of all offence, I trust that I shall avoid the suspicion of holding a brief for any party or patriotism. To those whose own loyalties are already fixed, and whose passions are enlisted against anything that happens to conflict with them, I can only plead, in all humility, "Strike, but hear me!"

At least let it not be thought that truth and patriotism can ever be at variance. God forbid that any lover of England should think so lightly of her as to condescend, on her behalf, to the shifts of the special pleader, or that he should find no nobler grounds for his patriotism than in boasting of her superior bigness to the country of Shakespeare or her greater

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might than the realm of Alfred ! What is there more necessarily lovable in Empire than in elephantiasis ? England is a spirit, and it is in spirit and in truth that she demands to be worshipped. Were she to sink to whatever journalists understand by the status of a fifth-rate power, were her Empire to be dissolved and her very name erased from the map, her spirit, a spirit jealous of individual rights and capable of informing a free commonwealth of nations, might yet survive for the redemption of mankind from the new tyranny and the night of civilization. For it is only by fulfilment in a wider love that patriotism rises superior to an enormously multiplied selfishness, or that it comes to signify anything better to mankind than suicidal mania.

If I am asked for the moral of the story, I shall reply that, if it exists, it is open for every reader to draw it for himself. It is too much to expect of the mere story-teller that he should damn himself by crying in the wilderness "Repent and be saved !" or in the market-place, "Bring your minds up to the date of your machines !" It would, even so, require a more than common faith to conclude upon the assurance, "For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

# BOOK I

## YEARS OF DISILLUSION

### CHAPTER I

#### MARCIA FUNEBRE

IT would seem as if, in England, some special significance attached to the death of a Queen. "Queen Elizabeth's dead" is known to have been a *cliché* when Queen Anne was alive. And then, in her turn, good Queen Anne continued to die daily, long after people had ceased to remember much else about her. But when in the first dawn of the Twentieth Century the nation awoke to the consciousness that another English Queen had been gathered to her fathers, few of her subjects could have dared imagine that the news would ever come to be regarded as stale. For decades now "our gracious Queen" had ceased to be a woman of mortal clay, and had become as much of a symbolic figure as Britannia herself. And it was as a symbolic event of immense significance, that the final wearing out of her poor old brain cells was felt and deplored. It was not Victoria that was dead, but something with which her name and reign would forever be associated, some guarantee of safety, of permanence, of assured progress.

Never was there a more impressive pageant than that of the great Queen's last journey from the *chapelle ardente* at Osborne to St. George's Chapel at Windsor, its temporary resting-place on the way to her husband's side beneath the dome at Frogmore. But that last brief stage was accomplished in the privacy of family mourning—appropriately so, because it was

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not the little woman in the coffin whose passing had drawn vast crowds to stand in awestruck silence under a bleak February sky, but something more like that procession of the lost hours, bearing Time to his tomb in eternity. It was the nineteenth century that was heard passing in the rumble of the gun-carriage wheels, attended by all the pomp and majesty of an old order that was already beginning to yield place to new.

It was an order hedged by the divinity that still attached to the persons of Kings. No doubt Divine Right was not what it had been in the days when *Le Roi Soleil* had included the State, and the Merry Monarch had healed with his touch. But Royalty was still felt to be the glittering varnish on the surface of society, that preserved things as they were from the approaches of dry rot. There, behind the coffin, rode the new King, the Albert Edward whose pleasure-hunting career had set the heads of all the Holy Willies shaking for decades, but who now, as Edward VII—and in spite of his portly figure—looked the very picture of royal dignity. He at least could greet the new age with a superb gesture, for had he not ordered the Royal Standard to be hoisted to full mast height on the yacht that had borne his mother's remains, through long booming lines of warships, to Portsmouth Harbour? "The King lives," he had said, as if to imply that this darkening of the Victorian sky was no more than the passing of a cloud at high noon.

By his side rode a younger monarch, whose superb and perhaps, to English eyes, slightly sinister appearance, attracted hardly less public curiosity than that of Edward himself. This was the German Emperor, who had, ever since his Kruger telegram, five years before, been the butt of every cartoonist in the country, and whose failure to hit it off with his English uncle was something more than suspected. But for

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the moment the nephew had almost won his way back to popularity. He had rushed away from some festival of Prussian pageantry that had been staged for his benefit, in order that he might be present at the last moments of the grandmother whom—as far as his nature was capable of any constant emotion—he loved and revered. She had died, literally, in his arms. When, on his arrival in London, some bold spirit in the crowd had stepped up to the royal carriage with a “Thank you, Kaiser,” Uncle Edward had turned graciously to assure him that the English people would never forget this visit of his. The same mood of cordiality lasted long enough for the Emperor, before his return, to wax eloquent about the happy relations that ought to exist between the two great Teutonic Powers. But the press had not been invited; the speech got badly reported, and the orator took umbrage. By such *contretemps*, in this strange upper world of ceremonial and make-believe, might civilization be brought nearer to the abyss.

There were humbler kings riding behind, those of Portugal and Greece, both destined to end their reigns by assassination. Behind them came a carriage out of which beamed the patriarchal features of Leopold King of the Belgians, who might have put in a fair claim for the title of the wickedest old man alive—indisputably his, if wickedness is to be estimated by its effects in human misery. This amiable potentate, although nearer seventy than sixty, was so troubled by his reproductive instincts that he had actually retained the services of a concubine on his visit, an impropriety that—even more than the financing of love’s elderly dream by the depopulation of the vast Congo Province—confirmed his Cousin of England in the resolve that this visit should be Leopold’s last. Among the crowd of lesser royalties figured a bull-necked, eupeptic individual just verging on middle-

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age, the Archduke who was afterwards to be launched into fame and eternity at Serajevo.

The ceremony was not only royal, but military. The seemliness of this no one would have dreamed of questioning, least of all the old Queen, who had been as fond of a scarlet uniform as the humblest housemaid among her subjects, and who, with characteristic attention to detail, had left precise directions concerning the manner of her obsequies. Nothing would serve for a hearse but a gun-carriage, or rather, three successive gun-carriages, and they were draped with the khaki of militant imperialism. The whole way was lined with soldiers with reversed arms—except when some Eton boy volunteers, in their eagerness to see the show, forgot to reverse<sup>1</sup>—and military bands reiterated the strains of Handel's and Chopin's death marches. Even the impressive silence, that the multitude spontaneously preserved, was broken by a muffled and involuntary cheer when the venerable figure of Field-Marshal Earl Roberts, fresh from his supposed conquest of the South African Republics, was seen in the procession.

Just as in the Prince Consort's Great Exhibition of 1851 the whole emphasis had been laid upon peaceful progress, and the union of the civilized world by the free exchange of its kindly fruits, so now, half a century later, it seemed quite natural for the funeral of his widow to take the form of a gigantic advertisement of an Empire in arms. Those lines of ships, through which *The Victoria and Albert* had passed, were useless for any other purpose than that of destruction. Those reversed arms were contrivances for extinguishing life at a maximum of speed and distance. The very gun-carriage that looked so pathetically small and isolated was but part of a machine for the destruction of man and all his works. The royalties and other leading performers in the

<sup>1</sup> *The End of a Chapter* by Shane Leslie, p. 78.

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ceremony had to be dressed up in military uniforms. But even if the creative as well as the destructive forces of Empire had been deemed worthy of representation, it is certain that neither Lister nor Kelvin, Watts nor Swinburne, would have provoked such untimely applause as that which greeted the appearance of "Bobs."

Little more than three years previously there had been another great advertisement of Empire, as like in spirit as a festival can be to a funeral. That was when Her Majesty had been driven through the streets of this same London to thank God for her Diamond Jubilee. But if the spirit was the same, there was a subtle difference in effect between the first pageant and the second, a difference especially perceptible to the foreign participants, and perhaps most of all to that inscrutably observant rider at the new King's side. Then the advertisement had passed at its face value; everybody had been impressed by so vast a display of power and magnificence. But now—there was a breath of doubt beneath those February skies. The Empire had not been seen to the best advantage of late. The test of war had been applied, with results most unflattering to imperial self-esteem.

The whole strength of the Empire, at home and overseas, had so far proved insufficient to crush a few thousand Dutch farmers fighting for their independence, and though popular song might characterize "dear old Bobs" as "the little tradesman who does all the thickest jobs," it was becoming painfully apparent that he had come home from South Africa with the thickest part of that job still on the hands of his successor. Another rider in the procession was the aged Duke of Cambridge, who for thirty-nine years as Commander-in-Chief had concentrated his attention on keying up the army to the perfect performance of such ceremonial as it was engaged upon at this very moment. What else he had taught

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it might be—or at least was, on the Continent—judged by the numerous reverses, fiascos, and surrenders to which an unfriendly press did something more than justice.

Even before the war, the Empire had been pretty generally disliked beyond its own confines. The most successful player in a skin game is not apt to be popular with his competitors. But the English spirit, in those aggressive nineties, had been proof against hatred. It was rather a compliment, if you chose to look on it that way, of the lesser breed to an unwillingly acknowledged superior. But now there was a lack of respect more galling than that of love. In one of those witty cartoons that soothed the *amour propre* of the most polite nation in the world, Queen Victoria had been represented as the fat woman of a fair, being prodded, in a far from delicate manner, by President Kruger, with the object of demonstrating that the fat is padding—her greatness and her country's a sham. The same taunt was being whispered, and more than whispered, in a Germany that was already beginning to weave theories about the racial superiority of the pure Teuton, and to dream dreams about a new Punic War, with degenerate Britain in the rôle of Carthage. More significant than any froth of Parisian bad manners were the cheers that greeted the Queen's death when it was announced to a theatre audience at Munich, and the cries of "Down with England!" in the Parliament House at Vienna.

But these were after all foreigners, whose jealousy might be presumed. It was a more serious matter that England should show signs of losing confidence in herself, that even patriotism should take the form of nagging. Here are a few sub-headings from the contents of one ultra-patriotic brochure called *Efficiency and Empire*<sup>1</sup>: "Evidences of British Degeneracy

<sup>1</sup> By Arnold White.



apparent to Foreigners—The Evaporation of Elementary Morality—English Agriculture disappearing—Indiscriminate Mercy universally approved—Loss of Stamina in the English Populace—Universal Hostility to England evidence of the Incompetence of her Rulers”—and so on, and so forth, until one wonders how any son of the Blood overseas, after reading this kind of thing, could have wanted to maintain the connection with the Mother Country for a day longer.

Even this is tame stuff compared with an anonymous book that appeared in the month of the Queen's funeral, and did so well that a second edition was called for in the following month. Its title, *Drifting*, is splashed in flaming scarlet across a khaki-coloured binding, and its theme is the degeneracy of England, whose people won't fight except with their mouths, whose tradesmen sell arms to the enemy and brown-paper boots to the army, whose industries, thanks to "a commercial policy of absolute indifference and indolence," show "an enormous and continuous decline," and whose statesmanship, in contrast with the healthy realism of the Continental brand, is marked by flabby altruism—as witnessed by her support of the oppressed Armenians, thereby alienating her good friends the Turks, and driving them into the outstretched arms of Germany, for "practical politics," our author informs us, "are not dictated by lofty sentiment, but by sordid motives of interest"—and so, he evidently thinks, they jolly well ought to be.

The most unkindest cut of all came not from any obscure journalist, but from the accredited bard of Empire, Mr. Rudyard Kipling, who headed the chorus of Jeremiahs with a furious rhymed Philippic, in which he held up that still considerable majority of Sons of the Blood, who were not domiciled overseas, to the contempt and derision of a delighted world. He did not stop short at mere abuse, but plainly indicated the awful fate in store for these "flannelled

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fools" and "muddied oafs," these "poor, little street-bred people," these worshippers of "talking fetishes," when the "low, red line to Southward" indicated the approach of an invading army—quite obviously a French army—destined to bring the few survivors "under the yoke." If Mr. Kipling had waited another couple of years before putting on the black cap, his low, red line would have shifted to Eastward.

Poor old England had still one consolation. Let the heathen rage never so furiously and the prophets thunder never so loudly, there was still the fleet. Britannia indubitably ruled the waves. The misfortunes of poor Tommy on the veldt had done nothing to shake the national faith in Jack, the Handy-man, who, at a critical moment, had come to the rescue of the army, and taken on the Boer Long Tom at Ladysmith with his own 4.7s. It would have delighted the old Queen's heart to know that her blue-jackets were destined to come to the rescue, and provide an unrehearsed climax for her funeral pageant. For when the royal train arrived at Windsor Station, it was found that the artillery horses provided for the third and final gun-carriage had become so restive as to be unmanageable. As they plunged about, there seemed every prospect of a ghastly accident to the coffin. But somebody had a brilliant idea; the horses were taken away, ropes were attached, and a detachment of sailors, suddenly transformed from the ornamental to the useful, dragged their Sovereign's remains up the sharp rise to the chapel, whither, almost at the same time of year, a few loyal followers had brought King Charles the Martyr, and where so many of her predecessors lay sleeping.

There, after a service in which the leading dignitaries of the land and the flower of its nobility were crowded to the utmost capacity of pew space, they left the little coffin lying before the altar, and life, for the multitudes who had witnessed this last of their

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Queen's progresses, resumed its normal course, in a world in which Victoria was at last as dead as Anne and Elizabeth. And this, to the philosophic mind, might be deemed of greater wonder and significance than the pageant itself—for not the least important things are those which no historian thinks of recording because they are taken as matters of course. Life goes on. These multitudes—all but a few hopeless derelicts—sit down to an evening meal, brought them they know not whence; are housed and clothed according to their degree; find themselves entitled each to his portion, vast or exiguous, of the fruits of other men's labour; toil, luxuriate, and reproduce their kind, in the faith that the social system of which they are part will continue to function with the same regularity as the motions of the sun. Perhaps the faintest shiver of doubt may have awakened at the consciousness that Queen Victoria was no more, but there was something very reassuring in the spectacle of her funeral. Life went on in all its splendour and safety. The King lived.

## CHAPTER II

### AN AGE OF NERVES

And now that the last honours had been rendered to the Victorian Age, there was a reaction from mourning, a strengthening conviction that it was good to be alive and in the dawn of a new century. Everybody was agreed that the nineteenth had been pre-eminently the wonderful century; most would have added that the twentieth was bound to be more wonderful still, because it was in the nature of progress to go on and on *ad infinitum*. It was a simple matter of figures. So long as men had gone on estimating things in terms of spiritual values, you could never be certain of the future. That greater geniuses than Shakespeare or greater Saviours than Christ would materialize in each successive generation might be hard to prove. But it was quite safe to say that the motor-car of 1910 would be an improvement on that of 1901, and yet not quite so good as that of 1920. In the conquest of matter by science, the present is always the culminating moment, and you can be as certain of the future being still better as you are of the past having been worse. Chance and mortality were thus eliminated from human calculations—the car of progress had no reverse gear.

The man in the street, at the time of the Queen's funeral, if he had been asked what science had done for him in the last ten years, would probably have cited the motor-car and the phonograph, and might possibly have added wireless telegraphy and X-rays, none of which had yet begun to affect his daily life

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to any appreciable extent. He would almost certainly have ignored the numberless technical improvements, in every department of mechanical industry, which, because they made no strong emotional appeal, were not stunted in the press, but the cumulative effect of which was to provide him with a radically different environment from that of his fathers, and consequently to make the most exacting demands on his powers of adaptation.

Everywhere new materials were coming into use—steel framework for buildings, with concrete, galvanized iron, and other compositions to rival stone, slate, and brick; artificial fabrics for clothes; synthetic products for food, along with a vast extension of the canning industry; most of the familiar articles of daily life turned out cheap and pretty, thanks to the ingenuity of the chemist in compounding substitutes for the few simple and solid raw materials of the old-time craftsman and manufacturer.

But the change of environment that most directly affected the ordinary man was one not of substance, but of pace. It was as if, since the eighteenth century, the pace of life had been quickened up from a dignified adagio to a thundering prestissimo. One of the favourite words of the time was "hustle." The most approved of all ambitions was to break a record, preferably for speed. Railway companies eagerly competed against each other for the longest and fastest runs, and it was considered a point of national honour to build the biggest and most gaudily luxurious floating hotels, to rush tourists and business men in the shortest possible time between the murk and mud of Lancashire and the budding skyscrapers of New York. The cheapening of travel facilities enabled people to get about, and abroad, to an extent that had never been dreamed of in mid-Victorian times. And now the bicycle provided multitudes with an individual freedom and mobility that the coming of

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the motor-car was destined to increase beyond all hitherto imaginable bounds.

A great and steadily growing majority of the people were now town dwellers, who depended for the necessities of life upon a world-wide system of supply and distribution. Life in these towns, for a creature whose bodily frame was adapted to a struggle with raw Nature for her fruits, could not fail to be highly artificial. It was true that the enormous maladjustments of creature to environment that had shortened and stunted life in the days of the early factory system were so remote from twentieth-century conditions as to seem almost incredible. A long course of cumulative legislation had humanized life in the factories; sanitation had advanced with great strides in the last quarter of the nineteenth century; the housing problem had at last begun to be recognized and seriously taken in hand; municipal patriotism expressed itself in the erection of stately, or showy, public buildings, and the provision of open spaces. The effect of these changes was at least to postpone any sensational or obvious breakdown in the experiment of human aggregation on so vast a scale. But it was open to doubt whether the nature of the main problem had been realized at all, or more than the surface of it touched.

What was the effect of the new conditions of life on the nature of the average human being, and to what extent had that nature adapted itself, or been adapted, thereto? One thing at least was certain, that by the wage-earning class, the country life was not generally regarded as preferable to that of the streets. The difficulty was to keep the enterprising or capable young worker, of either sex, away from the town. The country was felt to lack excitement and variety. The town pulsed; the village stagnated. It was better to breathe smoke and have one's vision bounded by walls, than to suffer boredom. And life

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in the villages, in the dawn of the twentieth century, touched the nadir of boredom. Agricultural depression weighed heavily upon the land. The continuity of tradition was broken; immemorial customs and amenities had ceased to be honoured by a semi-literate generation, and country life tended to become a pale imitation of town life.

The town dweller, in a machine age, had to adapt himself, as best he might, to an environment startlingly different from that of previous generations. The very atmosphere was vitiated by the smoke of domestic coal-fires and factory chimneys, which not only clogged and poisoned the lungs, but also interfered with the hitherto free gift of God's sunshine. And as the light of day was dimmed, so was the darkness of night driven from the streets by lamps of continually increasing brilliance. The moon had ceased to be the parish lantern; its changes were no longer observed, and its appearance, at the end of a street vista, was liable to be confounded with that of a sky sign. At hop-picking time, when hordes of town dwellers were crowded into huts and encampments near the scene of their labours, it was a source of no small relief to the owners of hen-roosts and orchards that the terror of darkness kept most of the visitors from the temptation of nocturnal marauding.

Human nature, that had evolved in so different an environment, had now suddenly to accommodate itself to that of the modern industrial community. If we are to regard life as a continual sequence of stimulus and response, we can best express the situation by saying that the rate of stimulus was enormously quickened without any corresponding change in the faculty of response. There was little opportunity for that reposefulness—or perhaps slowness—of mind, that is the heritage of the yokel; the broad horizons were walled off; the din and bustle of pavements, the necessity of continual alertness, contrasted with

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the peace of the lanes through which Hodge trudged home from farm or field. Factory work, even if it only consisted in the repetition of some Robot process, demanded a constant keying-up of the attention. Minding a power-driven machine was a very different proposition from milking a cow, or even driving a straight furrow. The intensive standardization of the highly paid American worker was still in the future, but the acceptance of Our Ford's gospel—as Mr. Aldous Huxley would no doubt call it—was as inevitable, sooner or later, in England, as any other development of industrial progress.

The modern machine worker, who continually more closely approximated to the status of a machine part, turning out products that he seldom saw completed, to produce dividends in which he did not share, for limited liability companies towards which his trades union encouraged him in an attitude of class-conscious hostility, naturally demanded to fill his leisure with relaxation hectic enough to compensate for workaday conditions. This led to a development of vicarious sport that recalled the rivalry of Greens and Blues at Byzantium. In the neighbourhood of football grounds, on Saturday afternoons, might have been heard a fierce continuous roar, that rose and fell upon the breeze as this or that team of hired experts seemed to obtain an advantage. The mental dope provided by bookie and tipster for people who, as these gentlemen would have put it, didn't know a horse from a bullock, accounted for an ever-increasing drain of wages. And when gas and electricity took the place of sunlight, there were the music-halls, which, like the football clubs, had become highly capitalized professional entertainments, and had entirely ceased to be the old-fashioned singing and drinking clubs. There were, of course, the melodrama, and even before the end of the nineteenth century, the moving picture, or vitascope, was being exhibited as the latest curiosity.



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Again there was the annual holiday, most often at seaside towns, with swarms of people hiding the beach, and every sort of cheap and standardized amusement provided. Here, very often, and particularly in the North, the savings of a whole year would be joyously dissipated in a few crowded hours, or days, of life that was felt, by contrast, to be glorious.

There is no more easily abused word than "natural," but if we may be permitted to describe as unnatural a life violently conflicting with the previously acquired constitution and habits of any creature, surely this way of life of the industrial worker would appear as unnatural as that of a wild beast in the zoo. The same could be said about the black-coated city worker, passing his days in a town office and his nights in a suburban villa, a not inconsiderable portion of his time being spent in a packed railway carriage, getting to and fro between them.

The drumfire bombardment of stimulus to which mankind was subjected in a machine age was vastly intensified by the use of mass suggestion. Almost everybody, at the beginning of the twentieth century, was able to read, and the output of reading matter was continually being increased by invention. It was still the fashion to talk about the now superseded taxes on newspapers as taxes on knowledge, as if to impart knowledge were the prime function of the printed page. Any journalist might have known better. For every column that set out to reason or to inform, there must have been hundreds devoted entirely to assaults, in one form or another, on the emotions. Stimulus was applied to produce certain desired responses, the human machine, unlike the station automatic, being supplied with goods in order to produce pennies from the slot.

We have seen how the craving for stimulus was fostered by the conditions of modern life. It was the business of the journalist and the advertiser not only to pander to that craving, but actually to create it.

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The town dweller, who might see the sky seldom and the horizon never, did not feel the loss, since for a penny or a halfpenny he could be transported to a world of thrilling incident the like of which never was on sea or land. Everything that went on in this world was delightfully simple, and could be followed without the least straining of the attention. The tired worker could lie in bed, if he chose, on Sunday, and read highly seasoned accounts of all the foulest crimes and divorces of the past week, voluminous sporting chronicles, a miscellany of horrors, accidents and misleading intelligence about "Society", together with one or two inconspicuous and garbled snippets of what might, in the ordinary sense, be described as news. This last he could obtain from his daily paper, which, under the auspices of the new journalism, he could now purchase for a halfpenny. Here everything was made as hitting and sensational as possible, the appeal being directed straight to the emotions, and every demand for concentrated thought carefully avoided. Parliamentary debates were boiled down to a few snappy sentences, foreign affairs were rendered palatable by crude appeals to national egotism, and the course of human history presented in the form of a sensational melodrama, every episode of which is punctuated by the cheers or hisses of the audience. Nations became persons, not the mixed characters of real life, but the heroes and villains of the Surrey-side stage, though even a Surrey-side audience would have boggled—as that of the *Daily Mail* did not when France was in question—at the villain who had been booed outrageously in one scene, figuring in the next as the immaculate hero, and being pelted with flowers instead of vegetables. So, too, vital but complex economic problems, on which the audience would have to pronounce a verdict at the polls, were presented to them in the form of childish but passion-rousing slogans.

Modern man's environment is not only constituted

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by the things he sees and experiences directly. He lives in a world of images, transmitted through the medium of the printed word, or picture, for in 1903 a new epoch in journalism was opened by Harmsworth's *Daily Mirror*, which originally started and failed as a woman's paper, but achieved a wonderful success when it was transformed into a daily paper with pictures instead of news as the principal attraction. The dweller in the great industrial city has not even that saving contact with nature that is the lot of the countryman. From his earliest infancy his nerves are battered into a state of acute suggestibility. He accepts a melodrama world that is presented to him in a series of violent shocks, as if he were holding the end of an electric wire, of which someone is continually switching on the current, and he reacts with corresponding violence and lack of discrimination.

Thus we find the man in the street, at the beginning of the twentieth century, pitchforked into an environment utterly different from that to which successive generations of his ancestors had adapted themselves, and one that made incalculably more exacting demands upon his own powers of adaptation. Of the necessity of consciously adapting his nature to so revolutionary a change, he had scarcely the faintest inkling. Nevertheless, some sort of change was forced upon him, whether he willed it or no. The machinery of stimulus and response functions by means of a nervous system whose ramifications extend all over the body. It is only to be expected that if the demands on this system are suddenly increased beyond all precedent, and if the tempo of life is continually being speeded up, the nerves will be unequal to the strain put upon them. And this is what we do find.

It may be said, in more than the purely medical sense, that it was the machine age that discovered nerves. As late as the eighteenth century, they were seldom heard of, because, like good servants, they

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went about their offices unobtrusively. If any one of us could be transported back into that time, what would amaze him most would be the toughness of men and women under conditions that, to us, would be sheerly intolerable. What must have been the sum of agony arising from teeth, in the days when dentistry was a torture to the rich and unknown to the poor? What from septic surgery, when anæsthetics were unknown, and operations were facilitated by a dozen or so burly ruffians holding down or sitting on the patient, while the doctor grubbed about with dirty fingers in his inside? Consider what life on a warship must have been in the days when food was scarce and almost uneatable, when crews were riddled with venereal disease, when discipline was enforced by constant blows of the rattan, and by formal and ferocious floggings at which it was often the expressed wish of the captain to see the man's backbone. No crew upon the seas to-day would survive such an existence physically, just as very few modern boys would live through a year of—we do not say such an establishment as that of Mr. Squeers, but even the old Long Chamber at Eton. And yet our ancestors seem to have taken these things quite comfortably in their stride, and to have made no great fuss about adapting themselves to them.

John Bull, in particular, had prided himself upon his phlegm. Even during his great struggle against Napoleon he had never got unduly excited—for when England was left alone against a Europe in alliance with, or subservient to, that seemingly invincible conqueror, national life went on very much as usual, and there was no serious question of a peace on any basis of which Napoleon would have been likely to approve. Even Waterloo produced no outburst of undignified hysterics. But during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, unmistakable signs were to be descried of the national temperament having become,

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for the first time, definitely neurotic. The tendency to get wildly excited on the least provocation, even if this should be no more than the sale of one of the zoo elephants, was very marked, and in the nineties came the outburst of music-hall patriotism and Empire boosting, many of whose recorded utterances read to us now like the ravings of lunacy. During the South African War this neurosis reached the pitch of unmistakable hysteria, of the kind that gave birth to the expression "to maffick." There was far more fuss about a check to two or three brigades on the Tugela, than there had been over the disaster of Walcheren or the surrender of Yorktown. Wellington, after all his victories, never had an ovation to compare with that accorded to a battalion of suburban volunteers, who came home after less than a year, having taken part in no serious fighting and having suffered fewer casualties than resulted from the orgy of their homecoming.

These were not the only indications that England was becoming a nation with nerves, a nation morbidly responsive to mass suggestion and extravagant in its responses. The day was already beginning to dawn of what was known, with accuracy, as the craze. The nineteen-hundreds were to see many such outbursts—ping-pong, treasure-hunting, diabolos, and all sorts of more or less honest competitions, harmless in themselves and useful to the skilled advertisers who knew how to exploit them, but unmistakably symptomatic of the ease with which mass suggestion could be applied. There were other ways which were not harmless at all. It might be a paying journalistic proposition to work up hysterical excitement and panic against the imaginary beings who were supposed to represent foreign nations. It might be possible to inflame already existing hatreds to the pitch of civil war. It might even be possible to repeat on a free and democratic electorate the experiment of Gadara.

### CHAPTER III

#### TORY SUPREMACY

It is largely a reaction against nervous instability that accounts for the trust reposed in those who are believed to be without nerves. A public that demands to be stimulated by hectic literature is unanimous in its admiration of the strong, silent hero, precisely because its members feel themselves to be neither strong nor silent. And so, with men in the mass, every access of neurosis enhances the value set upon phlegmatic leaders. It is the desire of the ivy for the tower, of the *malade imaginaire* for the specialist. Not that the phlegmatic are the only leaders in demand. The modern public wants stimulus as well as safety. In politics, if not in cricket, its ideal combination is that of slogger and stone-waller. Fortunate indeed is the ministerial team that is equally strong in both these contrasted elements !

This may partly explain the strength of the Conservative Ministry that was swept into power by so overwhelming a majority in 1895, and was returned at the khaki election of 1900 with that majority substantially intact. The most conspicuous figure in that Ministry, the driving force of the whole combination, was the leader of militant imperialism, Joseph Chamberlain. Few contemporary observers doubted that this man was destined, at no distant date, to assume the premiership to which his genius entitled him. Not even his enemies—and they were legion—dared belittle his importance. It was at his eyeglass, as a sort of bull's-eye, that shafts of anti-British invective and satire were aimed from every part of the civilized

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world. To hate the Empire was to detest its apostle. It was only natural, under these circumstances, that those who believed in the Empire should believe with equal fervour in the personality and gospel of "Joe".

But was brilliance the only quality that the electorate demanded of its statesmen? The man in the street might wax enthusiastic for Chamberlain, but did he trust him in quite the same way as he trusted Lord Salisbury and the Duke of Devonshire? The mere presence of these statesmen at the head of affairs gave him an indefinable sense of security. They were survivals from an age that had already become legendary. They stood apart, sufficient unto themselves, following the way of life traditional to their class, without the least self-consciousness or regard for popular sentiment. The gusts of mass suggestion, that swayed the democracy like reeds, moved them not at all. They did not get excited when the public was excited. If they ever condescended to get excited at all, it would be over something quite trivial and personal, such as the landing of a particularly big salmon or a pig taking a prize at a show. And even that excitement was not very keen.

These elder statesmen were, in fact, slightly bored with life, and particularly with modern life. Lord Salisbury could not even be troubled to recognize members of his Cabinet or to keep tryst with the Kaiser; the Duke of Devonshire could yawn in the midst of one of his own speeches, and remain playing bridge at White's oblivious of the fact that he had bidden his Sovereign to dine at Devonshire House. Even Death was not a visitor who impressed them particularly with his terrors. They robbed him of his sting by circumlocutions. "I think," said the Duke of Devonshire, in one of his last letters, "a big speech would settle me."<sup>1</sup> This is similar to a reported,

<sup>1</sup> *Life of the Duke of Devonshire* by Bernard Holland, Vol. II, p. 412.

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and certainly most characteristic, utterance of the dying Edward VII, "If this goes on much longer I shall be done for." More pungent, and racy of the hunting field, is a remark of the octogenarian Marquis of Abergavenny, the intimate friend of Disraeli and the puller of innumerable party wires, concerning a request that he should accept the headship of some local Conservative body—"An old fellow like me wants a bit of rest before he goes to ground." And surely no last recorded words were ever more expressive of the speaker's whole personality than those murmured by the only half-conscious Duke of Devonshire, "Well, the game is over, and I am not sorry."<sup>1</sup>

Since the Pudding Age of Walpole there had never been a time when unimaginative solidity had counted for so much. It was always the brilliant man that went under, when he was rash enough to challenge a direct conflict. It was Hartington's<sup>2</sup> secession that broke the power of Gladstone and ushered in the long period of Tory supremacy. Lord Randolph Churchill, who seemed marked out as the leader of a regenerated Toryism, had crumpled up and disappeared when he had tried to force the hand of Salisbury. The equally brilliant Rosebery had found his position, as Gladstone's successor, impossible when his leadership proved distasteful to so hard-bitten an old political stager as Sir William Harcourt, and when a canny but quite undistinguished Scot was available to take his place.

We can only guess at what thoughts were passing in the mind of the brilliant and ambitious Colonial Secretary, but he would have been more than human had he appreciated the strength that the Government derived from its ballast of safe and solid men. Those political investors who liked to take up a speculative stock might trust their all to Joe, but there were others

<sup>1</sup> Holland, *op. cit.*, p. 413.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Hartington became Duke of Devonshire in 1891.



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whose British caution preferred the safe and low yields of the Devonshire and Salisbury debentures. And what investor does not gain an added confidence from the presence of a few titled magnates on a Board of Directors?

Lord Salisbury's Government was, indeed, to all outward appearance, stronger than ever at the opening of the new reign. The mandate of the electorate had been of extraordinary decisiveness in 1895, but that such a mandate should have been renewed after five years' experience was more extraordinary still, and might have been taken to indicate a settled preference for a Conservative regime. But in 1900 the mood of the country was neither settled nor normal, but one of hectic nationalism, inflamed by war-fever, and it was rushed by a party manœuvre, almost amounting to the confidence trick, into the belief that the victory was as good as won, and that it only remained to secure its fruits by a popular mandate. It was notorious that the Liberals were for letting the Boers off lightly—perhaps without even annexing their country. Accordingly it was the easiest thing in the world to get away with the suggestion that every vote given to a Liberal was a vote given to the Boers. It was no less easy to concentrate the whole attention of the electorate upon this one issue, so that the Government was, in effect, asking the patriotic voter to do his bit for his country by authorizing the ministers who had won the war to carry on for the next seven years in any way they might think fit. Having thus chosen in haste, he would have leisure to discover that the war had not been won, nor—as reckoned by time—half won. Even so the problems which Parliament would have on its hands, once the mess had been cleared up, would be those of peace.

What guarantee had the electorate that the Cabinet had any plan of campaign for restoring the home front? Or that every vote given to a Unionist would not be a vote for marking time or naked reaction?

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There was an answer to this question, but not of the sort that gets into print or political speeches. Of all European peoples, none has been more naturally conservative than the English, more generous of its loyalty to leaders it has accounted worthy. The Englishman proverbially loves a lord, nor is such love necessarily ignoble. There is as much of romance in it as of snobbery. The cabby, who would inform his fare, with due adjectival embellishment, that he was no gentleman, was at least paying the homage of his order to the normal or ideal gentleman. He would never have said "You ain't no coloured plutocrat," or "unnatural millionaire." Inarticulate John Bull, if he could have explained his preference for the leadership of men like Lord Salisbury and the Duke, might have urged that they were the pick of a class of sportsmen and good fellows, men who could not be bought, and with a long tradition of social service behind them. Honest John had too much prudence, or too little imagination, to look for a new social Jerusalem descending ready-made from a Marxian or any other heaven; he preferred to see the existing order run decently and improved gradually. But he did demand of his leaders that they should play the game for the side and not too obviously for themselves. Moreover, he was capable of judging their leadership by its fruits, and if the tree proved obstinately barren he might, though with reluctance, have recourse to the axe.

There was of course a difference between the rural mentality and that of the town workers, who hardly ever set eyes on a squire, and whose natural loyalty was to trades unions in which a militant class consciousness was fostered. Yet even to these the Unionist cause was capable of appealing. The prestige of aristocratic leaders is not necessarily diminished because they are not seen with the physical eye, but have their images impressed on the mind by dint

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of lord-worshipping journalism. Of what this sort of suggestion was capable is seen in the adoration, unprecedented in the palmiest days of Divine Right, lavished on royalty, the avidity with which the most trivial reported utterances or doings of its members were perused, the tempest of enthusiasm with which a visiting Majesty or Highness was sure to be greeted. And it might well be that many an honest artisan took the wisdom of a distant Duke on trust with his beard, and would be more inclined to trust such an ideal being at the head of affairs than Bill This or Jim That whose human failings were masked by no such romantic illusion.

It may be conceded that, in the towns, this Conservative romanticism struck less deep roots than in the countryside. But the Government had another string to its bow, for in the towns was the fertile soil of the new Unionism, with which the name of Chamberlain was associated. This partly consisted in a strong emotional appeal to a militant nationalism that in one form or another was rampant among civilized nations, an appeal enhanced by the glamour and novelty of a world-wide Empire. But Chamberlain was too much of a business man, and too convinced a social reformer, to trust in any kind of sentiment that failed to yield substantial returns. It must be brought home to the working man that his Empire was a paying proposition, that for taking up the white man's burden he might reap his reward in employment and high wages. What form this demonstration would take, and how far it would be convincing to the potent, grave, and reverend signors who were Chamberlain's colleagues, a not very distant future would reveal.

It was a powerful bid that the Unionist Party was making for the permanent control of British democracy. Its ideal, inherited from Disraeli, was one of a government in the best sense aristocratic, based on popular support, and progressive on evolutionary

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lines. But between dream and reality loomed one gigantic note of interrogation. No doubt Disraeli had judged his new electorate rightly in its capacity to follow worthy leadership. But was such leadership certain to be forthcoming? The new age presented social problems of an ever-increasing complexity, problems that demanded the highest intellectual qualities for their solution. Mere unintelligent straightforwardness was not enough; the demand was for something more akin to Plato's government by the philosophic cream of the community. Where in the public school education that everybody pretending to be an English gentleman had to undergo was the training for such leadership to be obtained? Statesmanlike wisdom is hardly what we should expect as a by-product from a manufactory of sportsmen.

But even from the intellectual standpoint, Lord Salisbury might have accounted himself fortunate in the personnel of his colleagues. He himself was not only capable of functioning worthily in the Presidential Chair of the British Association, but was the father of conspicuously talented children. His Cabinet included more than one former member of that group, nicknamed the Souls, which had made a splendid though short-lived effort, in the eighties, to achieve a Society that should be at once sport-loving and intellectual. Among these were his philosopher nephews, Arthur and Gerald Balfour, and the newly appointed Irish Secretary, George Wyndham, whose brilliant and graceful personality might equally well have adorned the symposia of Lorenzo de' Medici and the circle of Dr. Johnson.

It remained to be seen whether such leaven would prove capable of leavening the whole lump of a public-school bred upper class, and provide leadership capable of establishing that class's supremacy upon an enduring basis of proletarian confidence.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANTICLIMAX IN KHAKI

Whatever faith the ordinary man may have had in gentlemanly leadership must have been severely shaken by the experience of the South African War. The army was the very citadel of upper-class tradition, and an officer's career was more apt to be determined by his social than his military qualifications. Few Englishmen doubted, before 1899, that their army made up for its scantiness of numbers by being superior in quality to any other in the world, and the assertion "We've always won," in the most popular song of the day, was taken perfectly seriously. When the war broke out, much the same sort of language was heard about the Aldershot Army Corps as was subsequently to do duty for the Russian Steam Roller. The portraits of the commanders, with their bristling moustaches and rows of medals, were on everybody's mantelpiece. It was reported, with appropriate pride, that when one of the troopships, nearing Table Bay, had passed a home-bound liner, the first news eagerly inquired for was the result of the *Cesarewitch*. That was the sort of leader in whom England could put her whole trust—the man to whom the result of a race was of more moment than the development of a national crisis, and the course of the very war to which he himself was bound.

Never was there a more humiliating disillusionment than that which the South African War brought in its train. Except that by dint of wealth and numbers the Boer resistance was, at long last, overcome, there was little in which even the most infatuated Jingo

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could find food for pride. It would be hardly too much to say that the British army had become the laughing-stock of Europe. Its foreign critics were no doubt blind to the real difficulties of a task, which it is more than doubtful whether any Continental army could have accomplished without an even greater expenditure of time and man-power. But what actually came out during the war, and was confirmed by the findings of a Royal Commission, was disquieting enough. The upper class had been weighed in the balances and found wanting in the higher qualities of leadership. Mere physical courage was not enough. The British officer was an amateur, who took his duties only half seriously, and had proved lacking in brains and initiative. Of the country gentry who officered the volunteer units, even Lord Methuen, a guardsman, had been moved to suggest that the first thing to be done was "to come down with a good strong hand on those gentlemen with money and no brains."

South Africa had, even before the war, been known as the grave of military reputations. This notoriety it more than retained. Scarcely one of the higher commanders failed to return with more or less faded laurels. The two most conspicuous exceptions, Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener, had, significantly enough, escaped the ordinary social and regimental routine. The other commanders might well have been brought up in the old Roman belief that it is unworthy of a great people to win victories by anything but honest force applied in strict accordance with tradition. A Boer, who remembered Laing's Nek and Majuba, might have recalled Wellington's dictum, "They came on in the old way and were beaten in the old way," for Colenso was merely Laing's Nek on a larger scale, and Spion Kop a bigger and bloodier Majuba.

It was fortunate for England that she did produce one commander of comparative brilliance in the veteran Lord Roberts, though how far the brains of

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his strategy were supplied by Colonel Henderson, the biographer of Stonewall Jackson, is a disputable point. It was Lord Roberts who, for the first and only time on the British side during the war, applied what Captain Liddell Hart has called the principle of indirect approach, thereby capturing the whole army of the hitherto unconquerable Cronje. But when Roberts, having conquered the capitals and the railway lines, deluded himself into the belief that he had broken the Boer resistance, he left the long and wearisome task of ending the subsequent guerilla war to Kitchener. This new commander was a man of immense organizing power, who, as Mercutio would have put it, fought by the book of arithmetic, and sought to wear down the enemy by a process of straightforward attrition. He constructed long lines of blockhouses, connected by barbed wire, and then, by organizing columns like beaters at a shoot, endeavoured to drive the enemy up against them. Most of the burghers would find a way through either the wire or the cordon, leaving behind perhaps a few score of the less fit or stout-hearted as a "bag", and then the tedious process would begin all over again.

Meanwhile, everywhere beyond the range of the British rifles, the veldt belonged to the Boers, who not only held their own territory, but invaded the British province of Cape Colony, and set it in a blaze of rebellion. On two occasions the farmers enjoyed what for most of them must have been their first sight of the sea. Against Kitchener's plodding methods were pitted the dazzling tactics of three great partisan leaders, Botha, de Wet, and Delarey, the fame of whose exploits rapidly became world-wide. Even in England a certain sportsmanlike admiration could not be withheld when it was reported that de Wet had once again slipped unharmed through a dozen or so of converging columns. When, in default of his cap-

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ture, some pompous dispatch would announce that he had been "routed," the humour of the situation was appreciated nowhere more keenly than in England. A proclamation, that nobody—least of all the Boers—dreamed of taking seriously, threatening permanent banishment against any patriot leader found in the field after a certain date, had merely the effect of exciting ridicule at home, and contempt abroad.

It was in March, 1902, after the war had dragged on well into its third year, that the Boers scored the most sensational of all their triumphs. Lord Methuen, one of the best known of the British commanders, started off in search of Delarey, at the head of a patchwork force composed largely of mounted detachments from newly raised South African units. This was attacked by the Boers in the open veldt. Superbly handled by their leaders, the burghers circled round the flanks and rear of the lumbering column, and finally charged home, firing from the saddle. The whole of the colonial horse bolted in panic, leaving their general, with a small nucleus of British regulars, to put up a gallant but hopeless defence. The chivalrous Delarey, having captured Lord Methuen as he lay wounded, declined to retain so valuable a hostage—and this at a time when the leaders of the Cape Dutch were being shot, when captured, for "treason"—but returned him to the British lines in order that he might obtain proper medical treatment.

The spectacular honours were certainly with the Boers. And if we turn to the prosaic details of organization, that fill so small a space in military chronicles, but are so vital to the success of campaigns, the record of the British army, until Kitchener infused some measure of efficiency, is one of tragic muddling and blundering. It was only when the findings of the Royal Commission were published that the full extent of this was realized. The unfortunate soldiers had been sent into action with rifles



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incorrectly sighted, swords less capable of injury than hunting crops, boots that made marching a torture, pouches that littered the veldt with cartridges, entrenching tools that might have come out of a seaside toyshop. The mounted arm being dominant, for probably the last time in history, the business of providing remounts became of especial importance, and this was not only mismanaged more grossly than any other department of the service, but there were scandals of corruption. As for the medical service, disease accounted for more victims than bullets, a striking contrast with the Great War, where the proportion was something like 1 to 10. Nearly half a century after Florence Nightingale had gone out to Scutari, the old Crimean inefficiency which she had scotched proved to be murderously alive.

If England sacrificed the lives of her own soldiers with such criminal prodigality, what could be expected when she was faced with the unprecedented task of sheltering and feeding the enemy civilians? Once the guerilla war was fairly launched, it became evident that every farm upon the veldt was a potential depot for roving commandos, and that burghers who went home under pretence of resuming their peaceful avocations could not, even if they would, avoid being pressed into the service by the first field cornet who came along. The war might have gone on for ever if the farms had been left standing and inhabited. Besides, once the men were withdrawn, it would have been unthinkable to have left the women and children isolated in the vast loneliness of the veldt at the mercy of their Kaffir servants. To gather these people into the shelter of concentration camps was a measure not only of prudence, but of common humanity.

But to improvise, on so vast a scale, camps in which this scattered population could live and thrive, proved utterly beyond the competence of the British authorities. The Boer women themselves had scarcely the

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foggiest idea of hygiene, and it was not long before disease was rife in the crowded camps, and the children began to die off at an appalling rate. When the statistics of mortality became known, opinion all over the world was profoundly shocked, and even in England there was widespread indignation. The leader of the Opposition was moved to ask when a war was not a war, and to reply "when it is conducted by methods of barbarism." Another prominent Liberal went so far as to talk about "hecatombs of slaughtered babes." The Government itself was genuinely anxious to put things right; the camps were gradually improved and the percentage of deaths approached more normal proportions. It is remarkable that after the war, the memory of the concentration camps engendered less bitterness between the two races than might reasonably have been expected. No doubt the Boers, in their unsentimental way, could distinguish the effects of honest fecklessness from those of deliberate inhumanity.

As month by month the war dragged on, whatever of the spectacular or heroic element it may have originally possessed was eliminated. Like most other wars, it degenerated into sheer and sordid boredom, punctuated by occasional bouts of killing. It ceased to be good copy in the press. Even de Wet's publicity value slumped after a time, though it had a momentary revival when he broke one of the many cordons arranged for his benefit by reviving Hannibal's expedient of stampeding cattle at the enemy lines. It was in vain that indignant satirists called attention to the greater prominence given in the press to racing and football contests than to the surprise of a detachment of yeomanry or the rushing of some isolated post. The journalists would have been only too delighted to stunt war news. But not all the resources of Fleet Street could get any other reaction than a yawn to the sort of stimulus that, two years ago, had set off

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their public mafficking and flag-waving in an ecstasy of vicarious patriotism.

Even Tommy himself, the "gentleman in khaki doing his country's work," was doing it with an absence of enthusiasm that ran counter to all traditional notions. For Tommy was after all only a workman fed up with his job. As Major-General Brabazon, one of the most successful commanders at the front, candidly informed the Royal Commission, "Our troops degenerated most terribly towards the finish, when they got sick of it. I do not think our troops fought too well, you know." Even the stimulus of hatred was lacking, the atrocity propaganda, the manufacture of which is now one of the prime functions of a nation in arms, had long ceased to carry conviction. Tommy and Piet had got to know each other, and there had grown up between them the sort of half-humorous comradeship that actuates the professionals of rival teams. Even being taken prisoner merely meant being turned loose on the veldt minus one's equipment or essential portions of one's clothing. At worst, some exceptionally rough specimen of the farmer breed might bestow a kick by way of viaticum, but even this experience was preferable to that of stopping a Mauser bullet in some unnamed skirmish.

Now that the first fever of patriotic ardour had subsided, not a few Englishmen were asking why the war had ever started. Looking back on it from the detached standpoint of our own day, it seems that, with a moderate amount of tact and diplomacy, matters could have been prevented from coming to a head till old Paul Kruger had paid the debt to nature, and the Liberal elements in the Boer nation had become sufficiently dominant for a satisfactory compromise to have been patched up about the Uitlander franchise. But even granting the patriotic assumption that every war must be a fight to a finish, the finish, in this case,

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being the forcible annexation of the two republics by an empire whose motto was "*libertas*" as well as "*imperium*," there seems to have been every chance of writing "Finis" in March, 1901. The most statesmanlike of all the Boer leaders, Louis Botha, had been approached by Lord Kitchener with a view to arranging the terms of a peace, and a conference was accordingly held at Middelburg. Kitchener presented the unusual phenomenon of a soldier who was also a peace-loving diplomatist. It was his tact in handling Major Marchand at Fashoda that, more than any other cause, had averted the catastrophe of an Anglo-French war. And now, more than any of the civilians, he realized the difficulties of the task that lay before him of subduing the Boer commandos. He was, accordingly, for letting off the Boers as lightly as possible, consistently with the main purpose of ending their resistance and bringing them formally under the sway of Edward VII. But he had a civilian colleague in the shape of Lord Milner, the High Commissioner at the Cape and the newly appointed Governor of the Transvaal. This very able man was representative of the imperialism of the nineties in its most uncompromising form. The cold and relentless logic with which he had pushed the Uitlander claims had rendered the appeal to the sword almost inevitable, and even now his only fear was lest England should leave off before the Boers were well and truly beaten. It was his influence that prevailed with the Home Government in stiffening up the draft terms that, after a friendly and reasonable discussion with Botha, Kitchener proposed to submit. In particular, the Boer demand for an amnesty to such of the Cape Dutch as had taken up arms was sternly rejected. It is difficult to see how Botha could honourably have abandoned these, his comrades in arms. At any rate, when the amended draft was presented, he came to what proved to be the correct conclusion that, however

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long the war might go on, the Boers would get no worse terms presented to them, and that they had therefore little to lose except their lives in prolonging the struggle and hoping for something—perhaps Continental intervention or a Liberal government in England—to turn up.

The Government would have been acting in its own interests had it grasped the olive branch while opportunity served. Every month that the war dragged on weakened its prestige and popularity. The victory on the strength of which it had gone to the country had been indefinitely postponed. And though there was no question of anything but a victorious peace, the long anticlimax of the guerilla war was debited against the ministers who had profited by encouraging false hopes. The more sick the country got of the war, the more eagerly it looked for scapegoats on whom to vent its annoyance, and as the soldier in the field is usually sacrosanct from public criticism, the politicians got even more than their due share of the blame. They were held up to merciless ridicule in the opposition press. One of the most talented cartoonists of the time, F. C. Gould, depicted the four most prominent ministers as singing in chorus,

“ We don’t want to fight,  
But by jingo when we do,  
We’re reckless and we’re misinformed,  
We’re optimistic too !  
We *can’t* make a war, and we *won’t* make a peace,  
So we don’t know when the war is going to stop ! ”

Stop, however, it did eventually, by dint of exhaustion on both sides. By the summer of 1902 it had become evident that the wearing down of the Boer resistance could be only a question of time, though that time might yet be indefinitely prolonged. The drives were becoming steadily more effective, and the British commanders had begun to specialize in night

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attacks on the Boer laagers. The Boers had put up an heroic fight for their independence, but like the stolid realists they were, they had no sentimental desire to die in the last ditch for the sake of honour. Things being as they were, it was the common-sense course to strike the best bargain possible with a victor who, for his part, had had more than enough of fighting. There were irreconcilable spirits on both sides—the indomitable de Wet was as stout as ever for independence, and the stern and unbending Milner, to whom the very idea of peace by negotiation savoured of weakness, would rather have continued the process of attrition to the bitter end than have accepted anything short of complete surrender. But this time it was the counsels of the moderates, Kitchener and Botha, that prevailed, and a peace was presently patched up on lines closely resembling those which had been under discussion at Middelburg more than a year before.

The Boers were to take an oath of allegiance to King Edward—whatever precise significance this ceremony may have had for them—they were to be allowed rifles on registration, and for the first time, perhaps, on record, the victors undertook to pay an indemnity to the vanquished, in the shape of £3,000,000, to be devoted to rebuilding and restocking the farms. Representative institutions were promised, and though some temporary British-controlled administration was set up, it must have been fairly evident to the Boers—what Kitchener is believed to have suggested to them informally at the Peace Conference—that with the advent of their friends, the Liberals, to power, they would obtain as large a measure of freedom within the Empire as even they could desire.

And so, leaving their prison camps at St. Helena and their laagers on the veldt, the burghers trekked back to their farms, and once the normal routine of life was resumed, found that it went on under

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Edward VII much as it had done under Paul Kruger. In England, the news that the long-expected finish had at last come led to a faint recrudescence of the mafficking spirit. Crowds celebrated the coming of peace by bawling the popular song of the moment,

Good-bye, Dolly, I must leave you,  
Though it pains my heart to go !  
Something tells me I must leave you  
For the front to fight the foe !

while the pacific enthusiasm of the Cambridge undergraduates waxed so great that several hundred pounds' worth of damage was achieved.

Another popular song at the beginning of the war had attempted to define the issue in the words,

Is Boer or Briton going to rule ?  
That's what we want to know.

The appeal to violence in default of reason had afforded no final answer to that question ; the century was not fifteen years old before the Boers themselves had shown how to round up their hitherto uncapturable de Wet, and not thirty before a Boer administration, intransigently nationalist, was in power over the whole of South Africa, under conditions amounting in everything but name to independence. Even so, it was by no means certain that this administration had the least real desire to cut the bond, thinner than gossamer, yet stronger than links of iron, that bound together the British Commonwealth of Nations.

Whatever the future might hold in store, it sufficed for the present that, somehow or other, the war had come to a conclusion that could be called victorious, just in time for the new King's coronation at Westminster. It was said that Edward VII had exerted all his influence to get the war out of the way before this was due to take place. If so, it showed that instinctive sense of the fitness of things which was the most conspicuous of his kingly qualifications. For

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to most Englishmen, the Coronation signified a grand forgetfulness of whatever was unpleasant or humiliating in the immediate past, just as at the Hebrew jubilee there had been a general wiping out of old debts, and a new blank page to start the creditor's account book. The business of avenging Majuba had been done long ago ; people had ceased to know or care what sort of a vote Mr. Beit and his Uitlanders might have to register ; the time had come for a chivalrous victor to shake hands, before the camera, with a gallant, but vanquished, foe.

And here were the three great Boer leaders come to England in the nick of time to play their part in the drama. They were, in fact, visiting Europe—and first of all England—for the characteristically prosaic purpose of securing whatever extra cash might be obtainable for their fellow-burghers, to whom the covenanted three millions seemed a wretchedly small dole for the purpose of getting things started again on the farms. As the liner conveying them turned, off Cowes, towards Southampton Water, they might have seen, to starboard, the warships already assembled for one of those great naval reviews that advertised from time to time the way in which Britannia continued to rule the waves, and provided free propaganda for foreign associations, like the German Navy League, whose object it was to get that supremacy challenged.

To this pageant the Boer leaders were to be invited—no doubt when these rough and simple men saw what sort of a power they had defied, they would confess, like the Queen of Sheba, that there was no more spirit in them. It is doubtful, as a matter of fact, whether they had had enough curiosity to bestow a glance in the direction of Spithead. When they appeared on deck at Southampton a strange spectacle greeted their eyes. A cheering and waving crowd had assembled to greet them for all the world as if they had been British generals or cricketers. They



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may well have been taken aback. All three had a few weeks ago been outlaws, banished for life for their crimes against the Empire. De Wet, who had given most trouble, had been proportionately vilified in the press, and accused of the basest atrocities. Whatever they may have thought, the three gave no sign, but retired promptly and impassively from view. The invitation to the review was politely declined, whereat the organs of extreme imperialism were less politely displeased.

## CHAPTER V

### SINS OF SOCIETY

So, five years after the Diamond Jubilee, the captains and the kings—or at least princes—began to assemble again in London; war-hardened sergeants got busy with the minutæ of ceremonial; warships were got up to look as pretty as paint could make them; stands were put up, illuminations prepared, and flags got out of store; nothing, in fact, remained but for the tumult and the shouting to burst out afresh—when all was suddenly hushed to silence, as if during some festal music, instead of the conductor's baton a skeleton hand had been upraised. The King, it was reported, was ill—the King might be dying. He must be borne, not to the throne, but to the operating table. The whole country, almost the whole Empire, drew a profound breath of relief when it became known that the operation had been successful, and it was soon gladdened by the intelligence that the captains and kings need not depart after all, until His Majesty, very pale and shaken, but impelled by that sense of kingly duty whose seeds his father had planted, had steeled himself to go through the long fatiguing ordeal of being crowned. The deferred coronation had done more to enthrone Edward VII in the hearts of his subjects than that which had been originally planned could ever have done. He was already popular to an even greater extent than could be accounted for by organized mass suggestion. Beyond all doubt, his was a personality to be felt and known, a personality of force enough to impress its stamp upon history.

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So there was to be an Edwardian Era after all, and now that that last inconvenient legacy of Victorianism, the Boer War, was out of the way, there was nothing to do but to enjoy it. For that enjoyment was to be its distinguishing note was generally agreed. Kings, even of so marked an individuality as Edward VII, are important, in the modern age, not for what they are, but for what they symbolize. And Edward VII was the supreme symbol, for his subjects, of the two things of which they felt themselves to stand most in need, enjoyment and security. Queen Victoria, with the almost divine honours that had been accorded her towards the close of her reign, had been felt as an overshadowing inhibition, an incarnate "Thou shalt not." It was not in vain that she had decided that, for her, time should stand still from the day of her husband's death, in 1861, and that as his room should be kept every morning as if he were still alive, so should the personnel and manners of the court be such as would have conformed to the rigid standards of his Coburger rectitude. The freedom of the *fin de siècle* was nothing to her, and if the barriers that had surrounded the charmed circle of London Society had collapsed like the walls of Jericho before a plutocratic horde in which the countrymen of Joshua were well represented, those that she set up round her court stood like the walls of Windsor, continually restored, and frowning with bastions of respectability over the flats below.

"Teddy", as he was affectionately nicknamed, only gained in popularity from his reputation as a man of pleasure. The Puritan sentiment that had sanctified the inhibitions of the sixties was now *démodé*. The Queen had been like an enormously respected grandmother, in whose presence everybody had got to be on their best behaviour. Her son was a jolly old uncle, whose house was Liberty Hall, and whose motto—within certain gentlemanly limits—

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“Fay ce que vous voudra.” It mattered not at all that to those who knew the King intimately, he presented not infrequently a side of his character that was anything but easy-going. His descent from a line of German Princelings had made him a stickler, to the point of pedantry, for the niceties of etiquette and precedent—there was probably no greater expert in Europe on such mysteries as those of buttons and ribbons, stars and medals, and woe betide those who were found incorrect in his sight! Even among his greatest intimates he was quick to suspect and resent the least encroachment on his royal dignity, as when one elderly and gesticulating nobleman, being a little short-sighted, happened accidentally to touch him in the course of an animated conversation. And like most men of pleasure, who have never been under the necessity of denying themselves, he could not endure, in daily life, the least opposition to his will or sacrifice of his convenience. Those who entertained him knew that everything must, at all costs, be exactly as he wished it, that he must be perpetually kept amused and never waiting for a moment—that not far beneath the easy-going surface was a quick and explosive temper. If somebody—even the Kaiser—got on his nerves, not even the weightiest reasons of State could keep him from showing it.

So that side of him was, after all, of importance, but it was scarcely known to the Man in the Street, and consequently did not affect the symbolic value of Edward VII. In the press, which served the average man as an acceptable substitute for his five wits, Edward was the universal uncle, with his smile and his cigar, the jolly old gentleman whose *bonhomie* nothing could put out. The press, where royalty was concerned, was discreet, all but one or two frankly blackguardly organs of a sporting tendency, whose robust Toryism did not prevent them from making royal weddings the occasion for lecherous

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witticisms, and who had hinted at a side of the King's life that was a matter of common gossip. Teddy, it was whispered, had gone the pace in his time—was perhaps going it still. And if he did, asked the Man in the Street, what of it? Didn't it show that His Majesty—God bless him!—was human like all the rest of us? And wasn't it a sort of royal charter for the minor liberties of his subjects? If the choice were between a merry and a moral monarch, the twentieth century would not hesitate. Few previous centuries would, for that matter, have hesitated either.

But a licence for greater freedom was only half of what the nation demanded of its Sovereign. He must carry also a guarantee of security. It was that which the aged Victoria had conferred in so supreme a degree—in her time, at least, her subjects could apprehend no major catastrophe. But the new century was troubled with nerves. Its safety stood to such reason as it possessed, and yet it wanted some visible and concrete assurance that all was really as safe as it seemed. This Edward VII, to an even greater extent than the Duke of Devonshire, was able to inspire. His own innate confidence was so supremely unquestioning. Nobody—except perhaps those who knew him very intimately—could imagine him nervous, or even in two minds about anything. As Whistler might have said—only not of art but of life—this man *knew*. To this day, the legend of Edward VII's statesmanlike genius persists in default of evidence, and it is tribute at least to his personality that it should be so. That there could fail to be profundity beneath so flawless a surface was not to be believed. Who more convincingly than he could say "Yea" to the existing order of things? The Duke might do so with a drawl and a half-suppressed yawn, but the King with a twinkle in his eye and a smile of compelling infectiousness.

There was something about the beginning of King

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Edward's reign—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say the time following on his coronation—suggestive of the Restoration. Victoria's reign had been one, if not exactly of the saints, at any rate of moral formalism. Whatever naughtiness there may have been stirring in the nineties was at least held in check by the Queen on the heights and such awful examples as those of Charlie Dilke and Oscar Wilde in the depths. Whoever refused to do open homage to the image of Baal-Grundy that the Queen had set up—or at any rate would not allow to be taken down—might be cast at any moment to the lions of respectability. The spirit of Victorianism had begun to depart as early as the seventies, but however the *fin de siècle* might chafe, so long as the Queen lived, the Albertine inhibitions lay upon the age as ponderously as Albert's bronze image upon its pedestal in Hyde Park.

Edward VII, like his merry predecessor, had come to make a clean sweep of this already superannuated order of things. With that *flair* for the symbolic that always distinguished him, he signalized his break with the past by converting his mother's beloved Osborne from a palace to a naval college, and satisfying a never-forgotten resentment against her faithful gillie, John Brown, by the summary removal, from its place at Balmoral, of his memorial statue. The invisible barriers that had fenced the court were taken down at the same time, and the plutocrats and smart ladies who had chased away dull care from Marlborough House now did what they could to lighten the gloom of Buckingham Palace. Money, the supplanter of birth, had at last with good King Edward come into its own; Cassels and Sassoons, Rothschilds and Lawsons, were such men as he delighted to honour. Now, at last, Dives was free to enjoy, to an extent scarcely equalled even in the days of imperial Rome, the good time that science and the social system

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ensured to those whose bank balances enabled them to levy the necessary toll on the labour of all who toiled for hire or salary from China to Peru. And this they sought with what was sometimes an agonizing zest, because of that small, troubling voice that had hardly, in these early years of the century, dared to formulate itself into a definite—"How long?"

Nothing as yet so definite, while the King smiled at Newmarket, while Mr. Balfour lolled on the Treasury Bench, and in the House of Lords the Duke slumbered peacefully. For the King, if he stood for the best time that money could buy, stood also for the social stability that made such a time possible. His innate sense of fitness taught him within what limits even licence must be confined. It might be safe, in the twentieth century, to chance the wrath of the Lord, but it would be highly dangerous to affront public opinion. Times were different from those of Charles II or the Prince Regent, and there was a necessary decorum to be preserved in face of a potentially all-powerful proletariat.

Thus Edward VII made up for any laxity of morals by an extreme strictness of decorum. It is said that when skirts first began to be tentatively shortened, the daughter of a famous Admiral went to one of the royal dinner-parties with her ankles just showing. The King—though with a twinkle in his eye to take off the sting of his remark, for Edward VII could never be really hard on a lovely girl—greeted her with:

"I'm afraid you have made some mistake—this is a dinner, *not* a tennis-party."

He was determined that in so far as his influence could secure it, even plutocratic society should present a decent front to the world. In the fastest house-parties, a veneer of propriety was essential. A hostess would tolerate no open flaunting of the Decalogue, though she might contrive a judicious

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conjunction of bedrooms. English society was still, largely thanks to the King, without a peer for outward and visible propriety.

Nevertheless, there were rumours, and more than rumours, of orgies in high life both shameless and widespread. The revelations of the divorce court, vomited up in salacious detail by the press, enabled the public to enjoy some much appreciated glimpses of what the veil of propriety concealed. There was one famous case, in which, after charges and counter-charges and endless muck-raking, both parties were sent unsatisfied, but still united, away. And there were others, equally spicy. An enterprising priest, Father Bernard Vaughan, leapt into sudden notoriety by a series of sermons denouncing the Sins of Society—Society thronged to his services and ravenously clamoured for more.

To describe these sins, in the utmost permissible detail, became a lucrative occupation for novelists. The most successful of these was Mrs. Elinor Glyn, whose *Visits of Elizabeth*, the first and by far the most brilliant of a series of her novels, all dealing with the extravagances of an aristo-plutocratic smart set, was published just before the Queen's death. Here the heroine, a debutante *ingénue*, is conducted through a round of house-parties, at the very first of which no less than two men—one of them the charming Marquis who is to make her his bride—casually attempt to seduce her. In King Edward's reign other novelists, without Mrs. Glyn's lightness of touch, stripped the decent drapery from a Society whose contempt of sexual taboos is described with a candour positively brutal.

It would be monstrous, on the strength of such evidence, to jump to the conclusion that Edwardian upper-class society was a hotbed of vice. The popular novelist, like the popular preacher, is out to create the biggest sensation possible, and the spicier



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the fare, the richer the reward. The journalist is catering for a public that demands its social intelligence dished up hot and strong. A record of humdrum respectability has no publicity value, and if there were no sins of Society it would be necessary, in these days of competition, to invent them. What fires of illicit passion were really alight beneath such vast clouds of inky smoke?

In the nature of the case, nothing like a precise answer is possible. But one highly important fact must be borne in mind. At the very time when Society had come to be talked and written about as never before, the word had parted with the definite meaning it had possessed in mid-Victorian times. Then Society had been a closed and limited circle, by no means easy to enter, but within whose bounds everybody was more or less acquainted with everybody else. It was a glorified club, a Society in the narrower sense, with its passwords and rigidly enforced conventions. But by the beginning of the twentieth century, Society had ceased to have any organic unity, and had become an umbrella word, covering all sorts of cliques that had no knowledge of or connection with each other, and, in fact, anybody with an estate in the country and a *pied-à-terre* in the West End, who could afford to entertain on a sufficiently generous scale. It covered also a drifting mob of parasites, who could not pull their weight financially, but who used their birth, their attractions, or their wits, to secure a constant series of invitations.

Society had, in fact, been put upon a business footing, and the royal recognition of plutocracy only helped carry the process to its logical conclusion. But this did not mean that birth had ceased to count, for birth itself had monetary potentialities, which its possessors did not hesitate to exploit. The most serious purpose of Society was to serve as a marriage

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market. The London season, from May to mid-July, was, like the mating-time of animals, one of feverish courtships in which the young of both sexes were brought into contact under circumstances best calculated to provoke the sexual urge. Every mother knew that the ballroom served but as a court of approach to that inner sanctuary, the bedroom. That the daughters of rich parvenus should barter their charms and cash for a name was as old as the Middle Ages, but it was American enterprise that rendered heiresses as marketable a commodity as canned meat. The noblest houses were able to console themselves for shrinking rent rolls by drawing on the millions of Old Man So-and-so, acquired in a cut-throat struggle for economic survival, incomprehensible, fortunately, to a bridegroom whose ancestors had done nothing more exciting than enclose the common lands of their peasantry or depopulate a few grouse moors. Nor were American millionaires the only begetters of marketable offspring. The traffic in heiresses, though the supply was naturally limited, was, like that in white slaves, cosmopolitan.

There were other and more arduous ways in which birth could be made to yield income. There were numerous services that needy aristocrats could perform—for a consideration. Daughters could be launched, introduced and, with luck, mated, in the course of a season, by some well-connected chaperon. Journalism offered a rich and continually expanding field of activity for those whose names carried conviction of their inner knowledge. It might even be possible to give the guarantee of a title to the honesty of some company, and trust to luck that your fellow-directors would go straight enough to keep your scutcheon untarnished. And it was possible, by encouraging moneyed friends, to be repaid in business tips worth a fortune. It would be difficult to compute what Edward VII owed to the friendship of Sir

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Ernest Cassel, but such a computation, if made, would be most suitably recorded on cash-ruled paper.

In a Society that really consisted of a number of little societies with no bond of union, and not much in common except the wherewithal to foot the bill, it was impossible to enforce any uniform code of ethics or manners. It was inevitable that there should be a fast or—to put it plainly—a promiscuous set. Money, to those without traditions, was made to be enjoyed. Why should they cramp their style with taboos? Few of them continued to fear the Lord of their grandparents, or indeed thought much about religion except as a *cachet* of gentility. The sentence of expulsion from Society, which, in Victorian times, had followed upon even innocent association with scandal, was robbed of its direst terrors when there was no longer any coherent Society to do the expelling or to be expelled from. A thoroughly fast clique might be relied upon to view with tolerance the lapses of its members, and those scions of ancient houses to whom association with Dives was a profitable investment could not afford themselves the luxury of a quarrel, on moral grounds, with their bread and butter. But there might be limits to tolerance even in these circles. With morals one might trifle with impunity and the connivance of one's set. But no set was openly vicious, and it was never safe to dispense with the whitewash on the sepulchre. It would, at any rate, ruin any chances one might have had of being received at court.

So that any priest or journalist who plied the rake sufficiently hard could always be sure of finding some muck within the confines of Belgravia. But to treat the whole area as if it were an Augean Stable was grotesque. The sins of Society were the sins of a few plutocrats and parasites who—for the very reason that they were exceptional—succeeded in attracting a disproportionate amount of the limelight. As that

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shrewd and bitter observer, T. W. H. Crosland, put it, "The smart set is composed almost wholly of the middlings who, having acquired wealth by grinding the faces of the poor, proceed to make themselves notorious by throwing it vulgarly out of the window." It is these people, Crosland says, who run the marriage market, who wallow in every sort of tinselled vice, and who sprawl before the titled and well born.<sup>1</sup> The really significant thing about them would appear to be that, instead of being frank and permanent outsiders, as they would have been in the previous generation, they were now able to insinuate themselves into whatever constituted Society, and to find titled and well-born people willing to encourage their grovelling and even to share their sty, provided it were sufficiently gilded.

Meanwhile, the change that was taking place in upper-class society as a whole was something much too unsensational for the purposes of Father Vaughan, Miss Corelli, and their like. There was a loosening of restrictions, but it was often so gradual as hardly to be perceived except by looking back over a period of years. So long as the grandparents, who had lived through the Victorian Age, continued to survive, they mostly succeeded in preserving, under their own immediate auspices, the continuity of their old way of life. Perhaps family prayers would be suspended on some temporary plea, and not resumed; perhaps some concession would be made about Sunday, or a minimum of feminine cigarette smoking tolerated under protest—but it was not usually till the next generation, that had been young and frivolous in the seventies, came into its inheritance, that any real breach with tradition was effected.

Right up to the Great War, the extreme left upper-class wing, as we may style it, of fast and vulgar plutocrats, was probably less numerous than the

<sup>1</sup> *The Wicked Life*, pp. 30-1.

## ANTICLIMAX IN KHAKI

Edward VII much as it had done under Paul Kruger. In England, the news that the long-expected finish had at last come led to a faint recrudescence of the mafficking spirit. Crowds celebrated the coming of peace by bawling the popular song of the moment,

Good-bye, Dolly, I must leave you,  
Though it pains my heart to go!  
Something tells me I must leave you  
For the front to fight the foe!

while the pacific enthusiasm of the Cambridge undergraduates waxed so great that several hundred pounds' worth of damage was achieved.

Another popular song at the beginning of the war had attempted to define the issue in the words,

Is Boer or Briton going to rule?  
That's what we want to know.

The appeal to violence in default of reason had afforded no final answer to that question; the century was not fifteen years old before the Boers themselves had shown how to round up their hitherto uncapturable de Wet, and not thirty before a Boer administration, intransigently nationalist, was in power over the whole of South Africa, under conditions amounting in everything but name to independence. Even so, it was by no means certain that this administration had the least real desire to cut the bond, thinner than gossamer, yet stronger than links of iron, that bound together the British Commonwealth of Nations.

Whatever the future might hold in store, it sufficed for the present that, somehow or other, the war had come to a conclusion that could be called victorious, just in time for the new King's coronation at Westminster. It was said that Edward VII had exerted all his influence to get the war out of the way before this was due to take place. If so, it showed that instinctive sense of the fitness of things which was the most conspicuous of his kingly qualifications. For

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And owing to the tremendous competition for rooms, prices were being continually forced up. Now that money talked louder than anything else in Society, those possessed by social ambitions strove to acquire merit by making as ostentatious a display of it as possible. Entertainments were on a scale of unprecedented lavishness—a coming-out ball at one of the really fashionable hotels might be easily a four-figure affair; not only one, but a second supper had to be provided—kidneys and beer consumed by daylight. The bill for cut flowers alone was often fabulous—one has seen the sorry spectacle of walls literally hidden by myriads of decapitated roses, as if some new Robespierre had wiped out the whole aristocracy of Flora's realm. Naturally the vulgar minority contrived to go one better by spreading themselves out in carefully advertised freak entertainments. And dressmakers, with their subsidized allies the journalists, were not slow to meet and stimulate the demand for fashions affording the utmost scope for prodigality.

The commercialization of Society involved that organized publicity that is the necessary handmaid of modern commerce. Gone were the days when noblemen dug tunnels and built palisades to hide their august presences from the vulgar stare. The new rich set the pace—who would want to throw his money about without an audience? Social value was publicity value—even beauty craved advertisement. The oldest families came to adapt themselves to the new conditions; what had been an occasional and much frowned-upon practice in the eighties had become the established custom of the early nineteenth-hundreds, and the bare shoulders of titled debutantes, exposed for inspection on front pages formerly consecrated to the music-hall, excited nameless longings in the breasts of sweeps.

In such a Society, the old taboos gradually ceased

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to have any meaning. They died hard because the older generation could see no reason for scrapping the principles of a lifetime. But the new arrivals had no use for them, and where they lingered on, they were becoming more and more plainly moribund. The great Victorian taboo of the Lord's Day was not observed in up-to-date houses, or observed only in so far as it might be necessary to conciliate the prejudices of old Lady So-and-so. It was the same with the practice of church-going. It might, or might not, be advisable to put in an occasional appearance in the family pew, especially if you had bought up the estate of the village squire, pew, patronage, vault and all. But the performance was gone through, if at all, without enthusiasm, and at steadily increasing intervals as its freshness wore off. It would not be quite true to say that the upper class of the new generation had gone atheist. It certainly believed in something that for want of a better name might be called God. But God's status in Society resembled that of one of those titled deadheads who are elected to the chairmanship of a Board in order to give the concern some guarantee of stability. Nobody dreamed of crediting Him with any real voice in the management or troubled much about what He might be supposed to want.

It might have been imagined that the influx of people who had made fortunes by their wits would have done something to cure that beef-wittedness and obsession with sport that had earned for the Victorian upper class the name of Barbarians. As it turned out, there was never the least sign of such an intellectual quickening. It was partly due to the almost complete lack of interest shown by Edward VII in culture, or its devotees, that accounted for the absence of necessary stimulus. No sooner had Dives entered upon his earthly paradise, in the shape of a country estate, than he strove to conform in every

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way to his ideal of what country gentlemen had been, and ought to be. His sons, fresh from their public schools, were particularly anxious not to display to their friends any defect in breeding. They took care to get into the Blood Set at their university, and when they came home rode to hounds, shot, and otherwise disported themselves with lordly abandon. In town they flung themselves into the pursuit of what passed for pleasure, a form of activity in which feminine legs were more prized than masculine brains. Or if they did feel an urge to employ their wits, there was a never-failing safety valve at the bridge table, this diversion, like that of crossword puzzles after the War, being one of the few crazes that showed no tendency to work its own cure. The contempt of smart people for anything smacking of intellect passed even into language.

Janie, she *is* so brainy!

“brainy” being the tentative predecessor of the notorious “highbrow.”

A Society thus

Restless, unfixed in principles and place,

cannot engender the concentration needful for even the most meretricious sort of culture. The art of conversation languished—the dinner-party was a function more and more exclusively reserved for the elderly, and King Edward’s English tended to become a rough-and-ready conversational shorthand on the lips of his most expensively educated subjects. Though there were still famous hostesses, one might have searched in vain in fashionable London for anything fit to be called a *salon*. And in the nineteenth-hundreds, there was nothing corresponding to the Souls, to raise up successors, in due time, to the Balfours and Curzons, the Blunts and Wyndhams.

The flood of denunciation poured out on the sins



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of Society was, no doubt, journalese froth. Society, as a whole, was not specially sinful, though it may have included and tolerated cliques of practising sensualists. But perversions of the truth may sometimes have more importance than the truth itself. For it was not so much what Society actually was that mattered, as what the public at large thought it was. The more it came to lack unity or coherence, the more strenuously did the press exert itself to supply the deficiency by creating an image sufficiently attractive to its clients to secure a maximum of sales. A new type of publication was coming into vogue, to minister to a state of mind that would constitute a psychological conundrum for any investigator not sufficiently habituated to its existence to take it as a matter of course. It consisted mainly of the dullest commonplace of gossip—for a ferocious law of libel exercised a salutary check on anything with the least point—about moneyed or titled people, and photographs of these same people snapped in pursuit of the most conventional activities, walking about paddocks, or stumping home from shoots. One can only imagine that the reader, day-dreaming, perhaps, in the dentist's waiting-room—an infallible repository of such literature—was transported for one moment into paradise; the programme of Lady Angelica Galahad was surely being held out for his—or her—inspection, and the "Haw!" that was surely escaping from General Drumhead's open mouth was for his—or her—personal edification. Even the impending drill was, for that blissful moment, forgotten.

But though the licence of the press did not—as in the United States—extend to personalities, there was nothing to prevent generalized statements and suggestions about Society to a public that desired nothing better than to be shocked by the sins of its superiors. One ingenious form of satisfying this

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demand was by a series of questions or innuendoes about the Captain who was horsewhipped last week in the Park by the husband of the pretty actress, or the Countess who thinks more of her chauffeur than her car. I once asked the editor of one of these publications what proportion of such amiable hints had any basis in fact whatever.

"On an average," he answered, "I should say about ten per cent. But then," he added, "I reckon on our readers identifying at least fifty."

So that, thanks to the combined efforts of journalists, novelists, preachers, and casual gossip-mongers, an impression was created that passed almost unchallenged at the time, and will probably be confirmed, on the strength of endless contemporary references, by the history books of the future, that upper-class Society, in the early nineteen-hundreds, was a definite body of people, wallowing in gilded luxury, and sexually unrestrained to the pitch of chronic nymphomania.<sup>1</sup>

This was all very well for the middle class of the suburbs, to whom the desire for these things was that of the moth for the star, the devotion to something afar from the sphere of their respectability. But what of the great wage-earning class, that was beginning to take stock of its place in the social system, and was becoming ever more conscious of the power, conferred on it by the vote, to remould that system in accordance with its heart's desire and the teachings of Karl Marx? No doubt it thoroughly enjoyed news about the upper ten—and the more intimate and spicy the better. But if Society was really as corrupt as all this, was it not a moral duty to relieve it of its ill-gotten and ill-spent wealth? What claim had these drones . . . ? But the line of thought is too obvious to call for detailed elaboration.

<sup>1</sup> Such, at least, seems the line destined to be taken in novels dealing with the Edwardians.

## CHAPTER VI

### SEEDS OF GERMANOPHOBIA

It was not so much a spirit of aggressiveness, as one of fear, that first drew England into the vortex of Continental politics. Those of her statesmen who were most inebriated with the power and pride of empire were the least confident of her ability to stand without allies. But even the loosest alliance involved taking sides with one of the two rival combinations that faced each other on the Continent, and were known as the Dual and the Triple Alliances.

How had this grouping come about? Its origin must be sought in the annexation by victorious Germany of two French provinces in 1871. The international situation was henceforth dominated and poisoned by the fact that France was inflexibly determined to take back her own, and to wipe out her humiliation at the first opportunity. As for Germany, she could never relax her armed vigilance for a moment. Bismarck, having been overborne into the one vital blunder of his career, bent all his genius to retrieving it by keeping France isolated. By a masterpiece of Machiavellian finesse, he formed a great, central European alliance with Austria and Italy, and managed to make assurance doubly sure by a secret pact with Russia.<sup>1</sup> It was only when the young Kaiser, William II, had disembarrassed himself of Bismarck, that the second step was taken on the road to ruin by Germany's refusal to renew her Russian reinsurance, thus driving the Autocrat of the

<sup>1</sup> One cannot help contrasting the blundering ineptitude of French post-War diplomacy in antagonizing Italy.

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North into the willing arms of Republican France, who at last obtained an ally of the first class and brought her *revanche* a stage nearer.

Such was the grouping of power at the opening of the century. From a purely Machiavellian standpoint, the situation might have been regarded as highly satisfactory to England. The balance of European power, always a main object of her policy, was made reasonably secure without any need for her weight to be thrown into either scale. The failure of European intervention to materialize at the time of the South African War was as much proof as could be required that she was safe from any combined action of the two groups. A policy of avoiding Continental entanglements had served her excellently since Waterloo, and never had there been a less obvious case for changing it.

But English policy no longer reflected the stolidity of squires, such as those who had formed the backbone of the resistance to Napoleon. The new phase of militant imperialism was one of overstrained nerves, and it was accounted one of the first duties of a patriot to live in a fever of perpetual apprehension. If the Franco-German-Russian menace had not materialized yesterday, it might do so to-morrow. A Russian attack on India was a bogey that had walked for a generation—and what was the little English army against those grey millions? Few among statesmen of the new school possessed the tough nerves of Lord Salisbury, who, in 1901, could write :

“It is impossible to judge whether the ‘isolation’ under which we are supposed to suffer, does or does not contain in it any elements of peril. It would hardly be wise to incur new and onerous obligations, in order to guard against *a danger in whose existence we have no historical reason for believing.*”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *British Documents on the Origin of the War*, Vol. II, p. 68.

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But Lord Salisbury was at the end of his career, and the dynamic force in the government was that of Chamberlain's restless personality. And Chamberlain, whose mind ran naturally to grandiose schemes, was by no means satisfied with so tame a policy as that of Britain minding her own business, and leaving her neighbours to mind theirs. Friends she must have, and it was a choice between Dual Codlin and Triple Short. Before the affair of the Kruger telegram, and even down to the time of the South African War, that choice was easily made. The Teuton was sib to the Anglo-Saxon; Germany was England's natural, as well as her historical ally. Even the most portentous of academic Dryasdusts were not above writing up history in the interests of Teutonic propaganda—the delightful theory that the Anglo-Saxons had exterminated practically the entire Roman-British population being accepted as gospel on the strength of more footnotes than evidence. In most books about future wars, it was Germany who came to England's assistance against France and Russia. William le Queux, one of the most sensational journalists of the time, described such a conflict in *The Great War in England in 1897*, in which, after England has emerged triumphant from the customary invasion, the happy ending is brought about by the German cuirassiers clinking their spurs in the Boulevards, and Germany securing the vast Champagne territory as her share of the swag. The time was soon to come when in Mr. le Queux's prophetic vision ally and enemy would exchange rôles.

Feelers for an alliance had, for some years past, been put out by Germany, but it was only in 1898 that Chamberlain succeeded in overbearing his Chief's scruples sufficiently to allow of his proposing, with his usual undiplomatic bluntness, the embodiment of such a pact in a definite treaty. Here was Germany's chance of cancelling the effect of her blunder in

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alienating Russia, and of making her own position secure for as long as human prescience could foresee. Had her policy been one of perfectly enlightened egotism, had Bismarck been still at the helm, it is incredible that she could have let slip such an opportunity. But in real life, egotism is seldom enlightened—the Devil is an ass. Genius had ceased to inspire the calculations of Germany's rulers, and cunning, equally short-sighted and greedy, took its place. Instead of the rugged old Chancellor at the helm, there was now the polished von Bülow, first Foreign Secretary, and afterwards, in 1900, Chancellor, but the decisive voice in matters of high policy was that of the wire-puller and intriguer, Baron von Holstein, who, in the obscurity of his office at Berlin, was able to wield a more malign influence over the destinies of mankind than has been granted to most mortals. Such men were incapable of framing a policy on bold or generous lines. The first thing that occurred to them on getting the British offer was that here was an opportunity for driving a hard bargain. The second was that the motives of the other party must be precisely similar to their own, and therefore to be regarded with the utmost suspicion. It is not to be wondered at, under these circumstances, that no business was done.

When that offer was renewed, three years later, the relations between the two Powers had already taken a turn for the worse. The South African War had aroused the already latent Anglophobia of Germany to a fever of hatred. Not only was every British reverse greeted with an enthusiasm that could hardly have been greater had the burghers been Pomeranian grenadiers, but the vilest and filthiest lies were put into circulation about British methods of war. The "Tommy", realistically depicted in forage cap and kilt, with teeth like a horse, was supposed to be in the habit of taking cover behind Boer women, and

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of finding even less reputable uses for his victims. All this was only a normal product of the intensive nationalism of the time—just as bad things were said in France, and, as the sequel proved, could be forgotten the moment there appeared to be a balance of advantage in getting the right side of England.

But Germany had embarked on a line of conduct more calculated even than insult to strain her relations with England. Hitherto she had not been seriously feared as a possible enemy, because she had concentrated her attention on making her army the most formidable military machine in the world, but had left the sovereignty of the seas unchallenged. Lately, however, she had begun to manifest an unmistakable intention to blossom into a first-class naval power. This was largely due to a temperamental kink of her neurotic Emperor. By birth he was half an Englishman, and the English Navy had always made a peculiar appeal to his imagination. He was probably never more sincere than when, in his usual flowery style, he spoke of his pride in being allowed to wear the uniform of Nelson and St. Vincent. But in the neurotic temperament, admiration is an only too frequent stimulus of envy, and this again of positive hatred. There was something very significant in the Kaiser's passionate though most undiplomatic determination to carry off the yachting honours from his uncle at Cowes. Anything to do with either England or the Navy had an extraordinary power of exciting him; grandiose phrases were struck like sparks from an anvil—Germany would grasp the trident, the Kaiser would be Admiral of the Atlantic, he would not rest till he had brought his navy to the height at which his army stood, and so on, language which might have given legitimate cause for alarm even if it had been realized that its sources were pathological.

But not even the bitterest Germanophobes of these

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days dreamed of taking the Kaiser anything but seriously. Those who attributed to him the most sinister motives admitted his brilliance, if not his genius, and credited him with the most far-sighted schemes of policy. Possibly, but hardly probably, if they could have seen the irresponsible ejaculations that the Kaiser—posing in the part of Frederick the Great—was in the habit of scrawling on the margins of State documents, they might have revised their opinion.

The Kaiser's naval complex afforded the opportunity for Admiral von Tirpitz, one of his only two chosen instruments—the other being the soldier, Count von Schlieffen—gifted with any spark of creative genius, to realize a life's ideal of creating a great German navy, though not, it would appear, necessarily for the purpose of wresting the trident from Britannia. The foundations of this policy were laid by the Navy Law of 1898, while German public opinion was still smarting from the effects of the pointed demonstration of British naval power, by way of reply to the Kruger telegram, two years before, and in 1900, after Britain had performed another priceless service for the German Navy League by the seizure on the High Seas of a German mail-boat suspected of carrying contraband, the programme of construction was doubled. As if with the special purpose of arousing alarm in England, the preamble of this new law was enlivened by a statement of Germany's intention to possess so strong a fleet as to imperil even the mightiest naval antagonist. The threat was as unmistakable as it was inept, and William, not to be denied the opportunity of dropping his own private brick, hastened to inform the world, at the launch of a battleship, that on the ocean and beyond it no great decision could now be taken without the German Kaiser. It is not thus that serious conspirators illuminate their dark designs.



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To anyone with eyes to see, it must have been obvious that Anglo-German relations were moving to a crisis. There must be a definite joining or parting of ways. It would have been more than human for a country whose very life depended on her command of the seas, to ignore a challenge to that command so openly proclaimed. If the wild words of the Kaiser, or the pompous boasting of the new Naval law, meant anything, they expressed a deliberate intention of making the German fleet as powerful as an army that was already, by general admission, the most powerful in the world. Those who knew the doctrine of Clausewitz, whose works constituted the German military Bible, knew that the force of armies and fleets was meant to be applied, with sudden and overwhelming ruthlessness, whenever the needs of policy might dictate. Bismarck had shown the way in 1866. And Germany was seething and frothing with a hatred of England, sedulously fomented, according to the custom of the time, by the press, whose worst ebullitions were reproduced in the English journals, and lost none of their sting by selection.

Had the stolid insularity of Little England still been the inspiration of her policy, it is possible that neither statesmen nor public would have got unduly excited about these things. England was quite used to having her supremacy challenged—there had been times during the last century when the French fleet, or that of France and Russia combined, had approached dangerously near to equality, a thing that the German fleet could not do for many years to come—and even ultimate equality seems to have been no part of Tirpitz's intention. As for "frantic boast and foolish word", there was always the motto of the Keith family: "They have said. What say they? Let them say". Let the Kaiser find relief from his neuroses, and German politicians season their measures with whatever eyewash pleased them best.

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But such an attitude, though good enough for old stagers like Lord Salisbury, was not likely to satisfy a public that, thanks largely to the perpetual stimulus applied by its organs of opinion, was becoming ever more excitable and prone to put the most sensational interpretation upon everything that was reported to it. It was the strength of Chamberlain that his genius was so perfectly in harmony with this new spirit of the times. It was essentially melodramatic; he could hardly make a speech without saying something sensational. Though he possessed an intellectual grasp far exceeding that of the Kaiser, he had the same capacity for blazing indiscretions and had already, late in 1899, blurted out his desire for a grand racial union of Britain with Germany and the United States, a suggestion that had been received with humiliating disfavour in both countries.

But as late as 1901, he still clung to his hope of an Anglo-German alliance, though under the clear understanding that if this failed to materialize, England would look for friends to Germany's rivals. Accordingly Lord Lansdowne, who had taken over Salisbury's post at the Foreign Office, made a last effort to persuade the German statesmen to come to terms. The project was less hopeless than it might have appeared, for despite the Anglophobia of the German public, the Kaiser was still, by fits and starts, playing the part of England's friend, and subsequently took credit to himself for having poured cold water on any suggestion of European intervention on behalf of the Boers. As for Bülow, he was quite ready to trim his sails to any breeze that might be blowing, and even Holstein had no special animus against England. But greed and short-sighted cunning were still the basis of their calculations. They ruled out absolutely the possibility that England could ever enter into partnership with either France or Russia—Holstein described Chamberlain's warning as "a

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thorough-paced swindle," and believed her to be in such desperate straits for an ally that she must sooner or later become the humble satellite of Germany on any terms that might be offered her. At his instance it was made clear to England that a simple defensive alliance with Germany would not do, she must join the Triple Alliance—a course that might easily have committed her to go to war for the integrity of the ramshackle Austrian Empire—and she must get this arrangement ratified by Parliament.

That was too much for any British Government to swallow, and Chamberlain, to whom all things were either black or white, decided that the time had come for England to scrap any project of a Teutonic alliance. He signalized his change of front in a highly characteristic manner. Speaking at Edinburgh in the ensuing autumn he dealt justly, if not judiciously, with the mud-slinging campaign that had been waged in the Continental, and particularly the German, press against the British Army. Hitting impartially all round, he reminded his assailants that the British Army had never approached the methods of frightfulness practised, at one time or another, by France, Germany and Russia. This *tu quoque* had the effect of arousing a tempest of fury in Germany, and Bülow took it upon himself to utter a public rebuke of Chamberlain before the Reichstag. It was not in Chamberlain's nature to take rebuke with patience, and at the first opportunity, a Silversmiths' dinner in Birmingham, he hit back with a shattering directness of phrase: "What I have said I have said. I withdraw nothing. I qualify nothing. I defend nothing. . . . I am responsible only to my own Sovereign and my own country." Of course the whole patriotic press of England was frantic in its applause, and talked of "the boastful Prussian rolling in the dust," but the only lasting effect of the outburst was to confirm and embitter the estrangement between the two Teutonic

powers. It was a very human outburst of Chamberlain's, and ranks among the classics of invective, but the Colonial Secretary was old enough to have learnt how seldom it pays to score publicly off anyone capable of harming you in the future.

The wire, as Bismarck would have put it, was now cut, beyond hope of repair, between London and Berlin, and events had begun to move, with tragic inevitability, towards a catastrophe that loomed ever more visibly ahead, but which no one had the least idea how to avert. The statesmen could have put up an excellent case for themselves according to their lights. Even Holstein was pulling his wires for what he understood to be the benefit of his country—and though a pettifogging recluse, he was no fool. He had argued with excellent logic from his own premises—that England was drifting towards war with Russia, and that she could never hope to reconcile her differences with France—to the conclusion that if Germany was to stand sponsor for the British Empire, she must and could extract a more than equivalent price for her services. As for the Kaiser, no part would have suited his theatrical instincts better than that of Theseus, a protecting hero, with the proud Amazon, Britannia, clinging and submissive at his side. And Chamberlain, like that other great imperialist, Cecil Rhodes, was equally sincere in his desire to give the utmost extension to the doctrine of racial solidarity on which modern imperialism was founded, and of which striking expression had recently been given by the admission of Germans and Americans to the Oxford scholarships bequeathed in Rhodes's will.

But the statesmen were the product of their time and the vehicles of its spirit. It is doubtful whether they could conceivably have deflected the course of events. It is not every generation that can be relied upon to throw up a Bismarck, and not even a Bismarck can juggle forever so as to produce equilibrium

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between the conflicting hatreds and fears and greeds of millions. Even if Holstein and Bülow had been as far-sighted as they were blind, it is more than doubtful whether German public opinion, lashed up as it had been into maniacal hatred of England, would ever have stomachied an *entente*, much less an alliance with her, and even in England, it is doubtful whether distrust and resentment had not gone too far for the press to have countenanced, or Parliament to have sanctioned, such an accommodation.

Now that Chamberlain's words had brought to the surface all the latent resentment that had, for some time past, been felt against Germany, the press devoted itself to the task of working up that resentment to a settled and apprehensive enmity. There is a cartoon by Mr. Max Beerbohm that brings out the spirit of those pre-War years more eloquently than words. A swaggering and ruthless German towers over a shivering *poilu*, while from his desk an enormously fat John Bull looks up with an expression of quaking disapproval. It was not only the yellow press that was responsible for the fomenting of mass-hatred. One of the earliest papers to apply itself to the task was the still responsible and dignified *Times* of the Walter regime, whose Berlin correspondent was peculiarly assiduous in making his countrymen acquainted with the most wounding and provocative things that were being said about them in the German press.

The two great war-lords of the English press, who led the campaign of mass suggestion against Germany, were Alfred Harmsworth of the *Daily Mail* group, and Leo Maxse of the *National Review*. It can hardly be alleged against Harmsworth that he was moved by any inveterate or deep-seated prejudice against Germany. Once he had decided to get his public worked up to a frenzy of patriotic hate, he could display the impartiality of the true journalist

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in selecting that portion of the human race that promised the most fruitful results. He had already done his damndest to provoke and embitter the South African War, and the wisdom of his policy was triumphantly vindicated by the enormous increase the first year of war brought to the *Daily Mail* circulation. He now aspired to fly at nobler game than a republic of farmers, the most obvious choice—and for publicity purposes the most obvious choice is usually the best—in 1899 was that of France. It was not in Harmsworth's nature, nor indeed in his interest, to do things by halves. France was publicly pilloried in his papers as John Bull's inveterate enemy. Dreadful was the vengeance that was shortly about to overtake her. She was going to be rolled in mud and blood. Her colonies were going to be taken away and presented to Germany and Italy. No sort of an *entente cordiale* could ever exist between England and a country whose character England had learnt to despise—whereas for the German character she had never had anything but respect.

It was only a few brief years later that this great patriot, now a Peer of the Realm, was moved to say in an interview, "Yes, we detest the Germans cordially, they make themselves odious to the whole of Europe. I will not allow my paper [it was *The Times* now] to publish anything which might in any way hurt the feelings of the French, but I would not like to print anything which might be agreeable to the Germans."<sup>1</sup> Such was the man who was probably more instrumental than any other in working up the hatred against Germany, and the panic fear of her designs, that, after the final breakdown of the negotiations for an alliance, was gradually heightened to the pitch of a national obsession.

Maxse, with his *National Review*, could not have reached more than an insignificant fraction of the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *England under Edward VII*, by J. A. Farrer.

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Harmsworth public, but he was read in the clubs by the people whose influence most counted, and his unwearied repetition of the same theme could not fail to exercise an effect out of all proportion to the size of his audience. He was one of those journalists who seem only able to relieve their pent-up feelings by the literary equivalent of foaming at the mouth. The volume and energy of his invective were phenomenal—no bargee could excel him in adjectival fertility. He, like Harmsworth, had first toyed with Gallophobia, but towards the end of 1901, after Chamberlain's passage of arms with Bülow, he began to devote himself to the monthly denigration of Germany in a fashion that might have moved the envy of a Cato, and seconded his own efforts with those of any contributor who could express himself with the necessary unrestraint. Thus the first number for the year 1902 opens with an editorial on the German Menace, followed by a *Plea for the Isolation of Germany*, by a certain C. P., in which the following advice is given :

“Combat . . . German Anglophobia by working all round for the isolation of Germany. Bring to her the perils of her detestable position between France watching for a *revanche* and Russia at the head of an irreconcilable Slavism.”

To anybody in his sober senses it ought to have been obvious that this was the way not to combat Anglophobia, but to encourage and exacerbate it, and to provide the German advocates of armaments and preventive wars with the very arguments they most needed.

It is not necessary to credit these men with any consciously diabolical motives. Even Harmsworth in spite of his gross inconsistency and his skill in always adopting that form of patriotism that promises the biggest sales, seems to have been a perfectly sincere patriot according to his lights. Mr. Hearst's

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alleged maxim, "Get excited when the public is excited," was obviously meant to imply, "Pretend to get excited." But Harmsworth, like the true Englishman he was, was at once less clear-headed and less cynical. His excitement was perfectly genuine, and he no doubt felt exactly the same towards France in 1899 as he did about Germany at any time from 1901 onwards. As for Maxse, his fanaticism was transparently sincere. Without something to hate he would probably have been miserable, and if there had not been a peril of some kind it would have been necessary for his peace of mind to invent one.

That there was a German peril, as there had in time past been a French peril, a Russian peril, and even an American peril, was all the more reason for a wise and dignified restraint, worthy of a great people, in meeting it. What was certain to multiply the peril, and to ensure its culmination in war, was to react to it in a spirit of hysterical emotion, to use the language, now of defiance and swaggering insult, now of panic-stricken exaggeration—language certain to be repeated in Germany and to arouse a precisely similar reaction there. If no more than the two or three leading press lords had been capable of acting upon the text, "Charity suffereth long and is kind," if they had been able to profit by the example of Queen Victoria, in her tactful and gentle handling of her imperial grandson, there would have been no Anglo-German and probably no World War. But then there might have been a falling-off of sales.



## CHAPTER VII

### TORY DECLINE

It can be said of England that if she did not encourage the leadership of philosophers in the press, she at least achieved it in the less important sphere of politics. For when, shortly after the Coronation, Lord Salisbury, having worn himself out in the service of his country, laid down the burden of office and went quietly home to end his days, the new Premier turned out to be not, as many had expected, the pushful Chamberlain, but Lord Salisbury's nephew, Arthur Balfour, who had made his mark as a philosopher before he had been heard of as a politician, and who, in the far from distinguished roll of contemporary British metaphysicians, might have put in a not unplausible claim for the leading place. He was a philosopher of a rather peculiar kind, for he had achieved orthodoxy by a scepticism more thoroughgoing than that of the sceptics themselves. Doubt, in popular parlance, had come to be associated with the undermining of faith by scientific rationalism, but Balfour turned the tables by undermining doubt with deeper doubt. However incredible they might find the universe of the faithful, the Rationalists and Agnostics had conjured up a vision even more fantastic and incredible. A godless universe turned out to be such a bundle of contradictions, that it became a philosophic necessity to postulate a God. The creed of super-doubt triumphant over doubt was hardly of the kind calculated to warm the heart, or inspire the regeneration of a materialistic age.

But it was characteristic of Balfour. What seemed

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in him the pose of a languidly interested, but emotionally detached spectator was in fact not a pose at all. His lifelong love of games is significant of his attitude to life—he mastered the art of Parliamentary debate with even more success than he achieved over the technique of the links. He had originally attached himself to Lord Randolph Churchill's Fourth Party which had played the game with a rigour highly diverting to the bored young philosopher, who stretched his long limbs in silent delight at the spectacle of his three associates making whoopee by persecuting Bradlaugh and bringing down the grizzled hairs of poor old Sir Stafford Northcote with sorrow to the grave.

Only one man, at this stage of his career, dreamed of regarding Balfour in the light of a statesman. That shrewd and cynical judge of character, Lord Salisbury, perceived that his nephew's philosophic detachment was complete enough to render him independent of such distracting emotions as fear—any game he had to play would be played to the last hole or rally with cold concentration. Accordingly Balfour was appointed, in 1886, to the critical Irish Secretaryship, the post in which poor Lord Frederick Cavendish had but recently lost his life. There were not a few Irish patriots who desired nothing better than to rid their country, in similar fashion, of an even less congenial ruler. But Balfour had not come to conciliate or to display the slightest sympathy with Irish aspirations. The game was one of firmness, and Balfour played it with an absence of excitement that must have been especially galling to the Irish nature. So far as such a policy could be a success, he succeeded beyond hope or expectation. Ireland, if not subdued, was quiescent, and—most wonderful of all—the Chief Secretary returned without a scratch.

The art of newspaper caricature, which consists

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in creating for public men imaginary characters for popular visualization, nowhere more signally demonstrated its futility than in its presentment of Balfour as the amiable rather effeminate puppet of the masterful "Joe." Of the two, Balfour's was the stronger personality. Chamberlain may be likened to a trim and fast cutter with sails always, even when tacking, filled by the breath of popular applause, and Balfour to a steamship, that shapes her course in complete indifference to every wind, from Boreas to Zephyr. When his intellect, after a careful balancing of advantages, had convinced him of the expediency of a course, he would act without calculation of consequences. It was he who, at the blackest hour of the Boer War, was responsible for cutting through the bands of official red tape, and sending out Roberts, with Kitchener as his chief-of-staff, to retrieve the situation. He had an even higher form of courage, inconceivable to Chamberlain, that impelled him to balanced or temporizing action, when his intellect had rejected the striking or sensational course as unwarranted by circumstances.

Such a man would have been in his element as Chancellor to a philosophic despot of the eighteenth century. Voltaire would have delighted to correspond with him, great Frederick would have respected, great Catherine have lost her heart for him. But for the premiership of a twentieth-century democracy he was likely to find his temperament about as well fitted as a razor for the sharpening of pencils. His detachment from public opinion was not likely to conduce to his popularity. The fact that he seldom troubled to read the newspapers, and saw no necessity of paying court to their bosses, was bound, sooner or later, to get the accumulated forces of mass suggestion put into motion against him. Moreover, Providence, which had endowed him with such splendid intellectual gifts, had, by way of compensation, denied him that

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of imaginative sympathy. His leadership could never be an inspiration. It is the pillar of fire and not the pillar of cloud that the multitude follows with enthusiasm.

Even before Lord Salisbury had quitted the helm, the ebbing of vitality from the Unionist administration had been sufficiently evident to enable far-sighted observers, like Kitchener, to predict its downfall at the next election. The long anticlimax of the war had stripped off the last rags of its election-time prestige and destroyed any kudos of final victory. The demand for the reform of the War Office and the army had become insistent, and was only mocked by a grandiose attempt to create a number of army corps on the continental model. These imposing bodies only existed on paper, and the whole scheme was soon exposed as eyewash, that left untouched all the faults of training and staff-work that had exacted so terrible a toll in South Africa.

In 1902 the Unionists, with the end of the war in sight, bethought them of the necessity for some sort of a domestic policy. It is highly characteristic of Balfour that he should have chosen as the principal measure of the Session, and himself personally have sponsored, a Bill for the complete reorganization of the chaotic educational system. Not only had the local School Boards, provided by Forster's great Act of 1870, proved notoriously slack and inefficient, but such secondary education as there was lacked any sort of co-ordination with primary, and even the scanty funds that had been doled out for the purpose had lately been ruled illegal by the fiat of a departmental auditor.

Balfour produced a measure that forms almost as notable a landmark in educational progress as the original Act of 1870. The old Boards were swept away, the County and Borough Councils were made the responsible educational authorities for their areas,

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and an attempt was made to unify the whole system from its basis in the primary schools to its apex in university scholarships. This scheme followed roughly the lines sketched out by those redoubtable Socialists, Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb, on behalf of the Fabian Society, and apart from its immediate effect in stimulating educational enthusiasm, has stood the test of time as well as could be reasonably expected by those who believe that the object of an Education Act is to educate.

That, as it turned out, was the last aspect of it to appeal to the popular imagination. Ever since its dim beginnings, the cause of public education in England had been dogged by a curse of sectarian rivalry. Multitudes of children must have gone illiterate between the time of Brougham's failure in the thirties and Forster's success in the seventies, for no other reason than that earnest Christians could not agree what dogma to stuff down their throats. The controversy was dominated by the fact that many of the schools had been provided and endowed by the Churches of Rome and England, with the express object of ensuring that the children should be brought up according to their respective principles, and this was gall to the Nonconformists, who had been too poor, even if they had been willing, to endow schools of their own. Accordingly the educational field was the scene of a chronic and holy war between Church and Chapel, the one always trying to screw a little more out of the State in the way of grants and privileges, the other determined to vex and cripple its rival in any way that might present itself. Whenever any scheme of educational reform was mooted, that battle was at once noisily joined, and became the main, or sole, topic of interest.

On this occasion there was another stimulant to righteous zeal in the desire, long felt by the Opposition, for a battle cry to unite its scattered ranks. For

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hitherto, if the Government was conscious of having cut none too distinguished a figure since the election, it could at least congratulate itself with the reflection that the Opposition presented an even sorrier spectacle, divided as it was into two bitterly hostile camps of Imperialists and Gladstonians. The expression "war to the knife and fork" had been coined to designate the various dinners at which this or that section of the party, fortified by champagne, proved its own Liberalism to be the one authentic brand. But even these convivial amenities were a poor compensation for the fate of a party divided against itself. Where there is a will to join forces, an excuse can usually be found, and the Education Bill was quickly perceived to be a godsend. The alliance of the Chapel with Liberalism had its origins in Whig and even in Roundhead times, and Imperialist and Pro-Boer could easily sink their differences when it was reported that the Church was, as in the days of Archbishop Laud, devising a new and monstrous tyranny.

The precise nature of this tyranny may be hard for those unversed in such controversies to appreciate. Such money as the Nonconformist had hitherto had to contribute towards grants for the voluntary schools had been taken from him by the tax-collector, and had not been specially ear-marked for any particular purpose. But there was now a county or borough rate from which schools of all kinds benefited, and it was somewhat more obvious, when the rate-collector came round, where the money was destined to go. It was intolerable that a chapel-goer should have to fork out a brass farthing towards teaching Tommy his catechism, though it was right and proper that Catholics and Agnostics should be touched in order that "simple Bible teaching" might be imparted to Judith. Nor were the Nonconformists alone in their eagerness for a Christian Donnybrook. The extreme High Churchmen, or Anglo-Catholics as they were

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beginning to be called, were for doctoring the Bill in the interest of their own dogma, and they found a champion of passionate eloquence in a son of Lord Salisbury's, Lord Hugh Cecil. The controversy was enlivened by the old fear of Popery, which still lingered on, even in the twentieth century. It is not wonderful that under these circumstances the original purpose of the Bill, that of adapting a system of education to the requirements of a civilized nation, was practically forgotten.

When the Bill had been passed by abnormal majorities, owing to the support of the Catholic Irish, a new and ominous element was imported into political war, one that showed how far the spirit of the age had begun to infect even domestic controversy. The new holy war, if it had failed in its immediate purpose, had been a triumphant success from the standpoint of the Liberal Central Office. Not only had the party been united as it had not been since the fall of Rosebery, but the evidence of by-elections was at last affording proof that the tide had definitely turned in its favour. It only remained to keep the indignation against the Bill at a steady boiling-point. Parnell and his merry men had showed how the skin game could be played within the walls of Parliament, and how legislation could be held up, not by argument, but by organized obstruction, and this procedure had been too faithfully copied by the more ardent spirits of both English parties. But Parnell's other device, of setting the law, once passed, at defiance, had not hitherto been adopted by either. Now, however, a campaign of Passive Resistance, as it was called, was organized all over the country against the payment of any rates that could benefit voluntary schools. An eminently respectable army of martyrs was recruited from the chapel-goers, and officered by their ministers. After the threats and blandishments of the rate-collector had proved finally

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ineffective, the authorities would proceed to a well-advertised restraint, and in presence of an admiring crowd, perhaps even to the strains of the local band, the good man would part with his parlour clock, or a framed copy of the Black Brunswicker, which, with any luck, would be purchased back for him by sympathetic friends. An heroic minority—less than a hundred all told—actually achieved the brief distinction of imprisonment.

In Wales, where the County Councils were Liberal almost to a man, another method was tried. These authorities would defeat the law by the simple device of refusing to administer it. They would blackmail the voluntary schools by refusing them funds, unless they themselves would consent to resign such privileges as the law allowed them. Money was even refused for fuel to warm the children in the winter. And when the Government passed a Bill to put this form of chilly persuasion out of their power, a bitter cry was raised of coercion, and there was one of those scenes in the House by which business was being held up at increasingly frequent intervals. Conspicuous in staging this performance was a certain Mr. Lloyd George, hitherto chiefly known as one of the most uncompromising of the Pro-Boer group, and a fire-brand of the extreme Radical left wing.

Warfare of this kind had one feature about it that rendered it especially agreeable to the bosses on both sides. For Unionists and Liberals, however bitterly they might play the game between themselves, had a common interest in keeping it a game. Anyone who had the privilege of being admitted to the gallery of the House of Commons would have seen the benches to right and left of the Speaker thronged, or sprinkled, with prosperous-looking gentlemen, all attired in the same funereal uniform of respectability. In the lobbies no one, who did not know the members' names, could have told which were Ministerialists



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and which Opposition. Such men would be naturally inclined to preserve the order of things of which their garb was a symbol, and to let the sleeping dogs of social revolution lie. The rigour of the game might indeed compel them to coquette with subversive theories and seek support from dangerous allies, as some litigious landowner might pursue a claim by hiring roughs to break down a neighbour's fence. But even so, the necessity was not exactly welcome. In the game of Passive Resistance, no more serious issues were involved than in that of football, and all the gains could be entered without deduction to the credit of the Liberal Party. But it was a different matter when the contest was one between Capital and Labour. Here the Liberal Party could, for the nonce, count Labour as its ally, and reckon every breach in the capitalist stronghold as a gain for its own policy of democratic progress. But could it truthfully be described as a net gain? Perhaps it was not yet realized that the tweed coat of Keir Hardie, though no longer seen in the House, constituted a more formidable threat to official Liberalism than the frock-coat of Mr. Balfour. But the Liberal forces did not advance to the attack with quite the same enthusiasm when the red banner was unfurled against the boss, as when the cross of Ebenezer was borne aloft against the rate-collector.

During the last years of the Queen's reign, the class war, about which so much had been heard in the eighties, seemed to have died down again of its own accord; Parliament and the nation had had something more exciting to think about than social problems, and too much money was wanted for killing farmers abroad to leave any available for improving the lot of the workers at home. The Unionist Party, which had once made social reform its chosen province, allowed itself to be overtaken by a form of mental paralysis, and instead of profiting by Bis-

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marck's example, and making it the business of the State to maintain its soldiers of industry in comfort, security, and employment, sat still and did nothing, well contented, apparently, with the fact that Labour as a political force continued to be negligible, and that in the industrial field, Capital had proved capable not only of signally defeating strikes, but also of organizing and strengthening its position. The militant heart seemed to have gone out of the Labour movement.

If the employing class had been capable of using its advantage wisely and generously, the capitalist order of society might have been established, for an indefinite period, on a basis of popular consent. But so far from having the imagination to progress, it lacked even the prudence to leave alone. The fatal tendency of the age to play the skin game on every possible occasion was revealed only too plainly in the counter-offensive against the dispirited Unions, which was extended from the industrial to the judicial field, the tendency of the courts to whittle down the rights of Trades Unions in industrial disputes having been notorious before the culminating and fatal decision of the House of Lords, in 1901, that the Unions could be cast in damages for the unlawful acts of their members in the furtherance of industrial disputes. This, whatever the rights and wrongs of the matter may have been, had the effect of upsetting a settlement that had lasted for a generation. The Trades Unions found themselves threatened with bankruptcy, and as the full implications of this new judge-made law slowly penetrated the consciousness of the workers, consternation gave place to a resolve which might have been expressed in the time-honoured formula, "*Nolumus leges Angliæ mutari.*"

The first question that naturally arose was—what was Parliament going to do about it? A Conservative Government was in office, and the Conservatives

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had owed their first great triumph of modern times largely to the indignation of the workers against the anti-Union bias of Gladstonian legislation. Disraeli's Government, true to his policy of trusting the workers, had so amended the law so as to redress the balance and to secure the Unions in the enjoyment of privileges which they had retained, without question, till the last years of the century. Would the men who yearly covered their great leader's statue with primroses allow his memory to be dishonoured? Would the Conservatives refuse to conserve?

They did nothing whatever, and by that inaction allowed the laws of England to be altered. Such negligence was far more injurious to them than their action in putting the Church schools on the rates, for now the impression was general among the workers that the Government was a class government, committed to a policy of naked reaction. It is true that the Liberals displayed by no means the same enthusiasm over the Trades Union as they did over the Nonconformist cause. They themselves were by no means decided on a plain reversal of the Lords' judgment, though they were willing enough to contrast the reactionary bias of the Tories with their own democratic progressiveness.

But the great social forces, as Gladstone would have put it, were moving onward in their might and majesty, with or without the help of the Liberal caucus. Labour, fighting for its own hand, had gained, without opposition, a seat at Clitheroe in the summer of 1902, and in the spring of the next year won a resounding victory, when a bluff East-Ender, called Will Crooks, contrary to all expectation, captured the Woolwich seat, with over 3,000 votes to spare. The writing on the wall was plain for all to read.

And yet, if the question had been put as one of abstract justice, it might have been difficult to show conclusive reason why a Trades Union, whose agents

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forcibly restrict the freedom of workmen to take what jobs they choose, should claim to be absolved of liability in the matter. Perhaps the honest answer would be, that in war the niceties of abstract justice must yield to the necessity of hacking through.

## CHAPTER VIII

### IMPERIALISM IN ECLIPSE

When, on Lord Salisbury's resignation of the Premiership, his nephew had been appointed, as if by right, to succeed him, Mr. Chamberlain had accepted the situation with quiet dignity. But it must have been with increasing disquiet that he watched the Government, whose policy he was powerless to control, manifestly drifting to disaster. It was not in his nature to contemplate, with the philosophic detachment of his leader, the ebbing tide of popular favour, in the faith that it would surely turn in due season. He was nothing if not a man of action—an old man in a hurry. The promise of his career still waited fulfilment—and the time was short.

When he had accepted the Colonial Office in 1895, he had aspired to live in history not only as a builder of empire, but as a pioneer of social reform. However far he may have gone towards realizing the wider ambition, he had fallen far short of making England a model nation as he had made Birmingham a model city. His old age pension scheme showed no prospect of materializing. The fact is that the exigencies of a forward policy had left him neither the time nor the money for such luxuries. His opponents did not fail to taunt him with his failure to do anything for the common people whose champion he had once aspired to be.

But the word "failure" was not in Chamberlain's vocabulary. If for a few short years the Empire had stood in the way of Social Reform, he would justify his faith by planning on so comprehensive a scale

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that the Empire would more than redress the balance, and become the means of financing Social Reform. Chamberlain was that not uncommon combination of business man and visionary, and it was the most natural thing in the world for him to put his vision of Empire on a business footing. And so, as Mr. Kipling put it, Joseph dreamed a dream and told it to his brethren.

But if we are to understand the dream we must first be clear about the reality.

An immense amount of vague and rather frothy sentiment had been worked up during the nineties about the communities of white men out of which the four great Dominions were beginning to take shape. To the city dweller at home they were endowed with all the virtues that Rousseau had postulated for his unspoilt children of nature. They were raw-boned, bluff, aggressively manly denizens of the wild, essentially simple-minded creatures, full of loyal devotion to their Sovereign and Mother Country. To that last of the great line of Victorian Romantics, Mr. Kipling, they were the true Sons of the Blood, differing from the "poor little street-bred people" at home in the fact that their blood was of a richer, stronger mixture.

This was hardly the light in which the colonials viewed themselves, or can have desired others to view them. Taken as a whole, there was little romance in their natures, and one thing that nearly all had in common was that intense concentration on the main chance which is to be expected in rapidly expanding communities. The pioneering phase was obviously transitional; towns were beginning to spring up with mushroom rapidity; manufactures were getting started behind a wall of protective tariffs. To take one very small indication: the Australian cricket teams of the twentieth century were recruited from a very different type from that of the huge, hairy

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“ cornstalks ” who had come over in the late seventies, and passed as typical colonials—they were now much more likely to be townsmen of spruce appearance and clean-cut profiles, who pursued the task of winning, or making a draw, with a remorseless concentration that had nothing in it of the care-free spirit of English sportsmanship. It was that same determination to make good at all costs that rendered the colonial so formidable a soldier, and so contemptuous of the parade-ground smartness that had been the pride of European armies. In an age of realism, he was the supreme realist.

Under these circumstances it was not to be expected that, for a long time to come, there should be anything in the Colonies corresponding to the distinctive cultures that had grown up among European peoples. These still half-formed nations had no background of tradition, and where everybody was feverishly making good, there could seldom be leisure for the enjoyment of beautiful things, or the urge to create them. The Dominions were indeed capable of fathering such individual artists of genius as Lutyens and Baker in architecture and MacKinnell in sculpture, but except in so far as Sir Herbert Baker formed his early style on the Dutch colonial model, these men were artists in the European tradition who happened to have been born overseas.

But the colonials—at least those of them whose descent was British—cherished a loyalty to the Throne and imperial connection that had already stood the test of war. Like most practical men, they were not without a streak of sentimentality, and the King, while no more likely to interfere with them than the Man in the Moon, supplied, in his symbolic capacity, just that element of glamour and dignity that colonial life lacked. Partnership with Britain made these traditionless communities feel themselves inheritors of her ancient culture, and—what was of more immediate

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importance—her cult of liberty. This cult had its roots in the English Common Law, with its emphasis on individual rights, and was the exact opposite of what Mr. Kipling meant by his Law of the Greater Breed, which was, in essence, that of imperial Rome. Inspired by such a spirit, the Colonies—or Dominions as they now preferred to be called—would never consent to be units of an Empire, in the true sense of the word, or tolerate the least suspicion of *imperium*, but they might easily consent to become partners in a free commonwealth of nations.

Whatever sentiment the Colonial might harbour in his breast, it would always be with the saving proviso that business was business. He might volunteer, in his thousands, for a war, but even Chamberlain had to admit that "if it came to another question, the question of the share they bore in the pecuniary burden the war involved—well, I think they might have done more."<sup>1</sup> From a financial point of view, the terms of imperial partnership worked out extremely favourably for the Dominions. They were sheltered from foreign aggression by the might of the British Navy, not to speak of the Army, and all but a very exiguous moiety of this ever-increasing burden was shouldered by the British taxpayer. In the Imperial Conference of 1902, Canada had flatly declined a contribution to the British Navy on the ground that she preferred to create one of her own, a pious intention that for many years to come failed to materialize into anything likely to be of the least practical assistance in time of war. One financial concession, however, the Dominions were prepared to make. The idea of imperial Free Trade had long vanished into air. The Dominions had accepted the new nationalist gospel, and were busy surrounding themselves with tariff walls to keep out the goods of all other nations, including England. But though they did not dream of opening

<sup>1</sup> Speech at Birmingham, 19th May, 1903.



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a gap in these walls for British goods to enter with the same freedom as their own goods entered the British ports, they were ready to make the wall against the Mother Country slightly lower than that against the Lesser Breeds. In other words, they were willing so far to honour their partnership in the Commonwealth as to grant a certain preference to British goods. But even here there was a difficulty, since this concession could not be reciprocal, owing to the fact that England being a Free Trade country, had nothing left to concede, and could only grant a *quid pro quo* for further favours by putting up tariffs against foreign countries.

Such was the situation when Chamberlain, late in 1902, went to South Africa for the purpose of preaching reconciliation between Dutch and British, and also in the not too hopeful task of rousing the big financial interests in the Transvaal to the necessity of making some contribution towards the cost of the war. He was probably not at all sorry to quit the field of English politics for what he himself described as the calm of the illimitable veldt. He had no heart in the education controversy, in which his sympathies, as a Unitarian, were not with the Church schools, and the inertia that had come over the Unionist Government must have chafed him sorely. Like so many men of vision, he found his plans everywhere frustrated by colleagues whose minds were incapable of adapting themselves to any new or startling schemes, and who were merely annoyed at any attempt to move them out of the old ruts. For an enthusiast, with a message to communicate, the sight of the Duke's half-closed eyes and hand raised to suppress a yawn, or even that of Mr. Balfour, languidly balancing pros and cons, must have been the reverse of exhilarating. Chamberlain was not the man to go down on a water-logged ship.

By the time he returned to England in the early

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spring of 1903, Joseph had dreamed his dream, and was prepared to devote the rest of his life to making it come true. He had for years past clung to the faith that the future, as he himself had put it, was for great empires, and not for little states. But nobody realized better than he that a British Empire—so far as the daughter nations were concerned—could be founded on nothing else but consent. To what sort of a going concern could the Dominions be induced to consent? The way of political federation had been ruled out at the Imperial Conferences, and that of a military and naval union was scarcely more hopeful. There remained the fiscal solution, not indeed on the lines of Free Trade within the Empire, but by a system of preferences. And as the only way in which England could enter this system was by raising tariffs against the foreigner, Chamberlain was boldly prepared to adopt it.

But here he was pitting his genius against something more formidable than an economic theory. He was violating a dogma that had been sacred almost beyond the reach of living memory. The Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 was supposed to have ushered in the years of England's prosperity; she had grown fat under Free Trade—before that there had been the Hungry Forties and all kinds of vanished horrors. Even Disraeli, who had risen to fame by denouncing Sir Robert Peel's apostacy from the Protectionist cause, had been only too glad that under his own leadership Free Trade should be tacitly accepted by the Tory Party, and Lord Salisbury had been of the same mind. During the eighties, when the agricultural depression had become acute, there had been some talk of reviving Protection under the guise of Fair Trade, but this was never taken very seriously in responsible quarters. The fact that almost every other country in the world had committed itself to Protection, only increased the pride of the islanders in their superior wisdom. The

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theory, as stated by popular economists, was as simple as two and two makes four—import duties *must* be more than paid for out of the pocket of the consumer. And accordingly any tax that was put on, or modified for the purpose of benefiting industry in the slightest degree, was a bad tax, one that violated the Ark of the fiscal Covenant.

There was, however, something nobler about the Free Trade cult than mere economic dogma. To such men as Cobden, Bright, and Gladstone, Free Trade had been a means of binding the nations together in a network of common interests. The free exchange of products would make the prosperity of each the welfare of all, and provide a beneficent substitute for war. The mere prosaic consciousness that business was business would cause nation to speak peace unto nation, and capitalist civilization would have automatically achieved that for which Saviours and Churches had, for countless ages, striven in vain. Incidentally, it would have shown how to reconcile the service of God with that of Mammon.

Now Chamberlain, when he returned from his meditations on the veldt, had it in his mind to tax imports, not with the immediate object of protecting industry, but in order to draw closer the bonds of imperial union. Speaking some two months after his home-coming, he could still assure his audience, "I am perfectly certain that I am not a Protectionist." But how long would he be able to maintain that attitude of economic disinterestedness? Like most men of overmastering will, he was neither a detached nor a consistent thinker. Once he had rushed into the fray, he was ready to pick up any weapon that came to hand. If a tariff was good for his main purpose it had got to be good for all purposes. Thus the apostle of Empire soon rallied to his standard the hitherto scattered and dispirited forces of the Fair Traders, and before long had put himself at the head

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of a Protectionist crusade with Imperial Preference as a modification of his programme.

If Chamberlain had hoped to make converts of his colleagues in the Cabinet, he was destined to be rudely undeceived. He had counted with confidence on inducing them to make at least one small and tentative advance in the direction of Imperial Preference now that the time had come for easing the burden of war taxation. One of the emergency imposts that had been most strenuously denounced had been a trifling registration duty on imported corn. It would not have been easy to prove that any housewife had found herself worse off on account of this duty—but to orthodox Free Traders it was that supreme abomination, a bread tax, the thin end of the starvation wedge, and, as such, not to be judged by evidence but condemned on principle. Chamberlain's plan was not to remove the duty altogether, but only to the extent of giving a free entry to empire corn—a concession that could have done no appreciable harm to anybody, but would have had the utmost value as a gesture. The new Chancellor of the Exchequer, who had succeeded Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, was a certain Mr. Ritchie, a gentleman of no very distinguished attainments, but a Free Trader of the most orthodox persuasion. Nothing would induce him to deviate by one hairsbreadth from that orthodoxy for any consideration whatever. The duty must be retained as a whole, or removed as a whole. And removed, in Chamberlain's despite, it accordingly was.

Chamberlain was the last man in the world to accept such a rebuff. At the first opportunity, he spoke his mind to his fellow-townsmen in such a way as to leave no doubt that, in the teeth of the Chancellor's scruples, he stood whole-heartedly for Imperial Preference, with its accompaniment of import duties. It was plain to all that Mr. Balfour's Cabinet was divided against itself on this fundamental issue. Mr. Balfour himself

reacted to the situation in a highly characteristic manner. Mr. Ritchie's orthodoxy and Mr. Chamberlain's apostolic fervour meant nothing to him. The problem was not to be solved by facile generalizations, still less by the repetition of slogans—it was, in fact, one of a complexity calculated to baffle experts. Mr. Balfour had the courage to admit that his mind was not fully made up on the subject. But he noted down his reflections, at some length, in the form of a memorandum that he submitted to his Cabinet. He applied to Free Trade orthodoxy that acid of philosophic doubt that had served him in his examination of Rationalism. He endeavoured to show that in a world bristling with competitive tariffs, a policy of free imports might not be one of Free Trade at all, but might result in an actual—perhaps a disastrous—restriction of trade. If trade was to attain the maximum of freedom, the State must be free too—free, most of all, from the dead hand of Cobdenite dogma, and able to fight hostile tariffs by retaliating, or threatening to retaliate, with tariffs of its own. On this conclusion Mr. Balfour was content to rest for the moment, without more than hinting at his attitude towards Mr. Chamberlain's proposals. But a mind so acute must have realized what sort of an edifice this philosophic basis was capable of supporting. The State that is free to discriminate against its enemies must obviously enjoy an equal freedom in favour of its friends. It was, at any rate, a matter to be decided on its own merits, and with a complete freedom from prejudice. Further—in this pamphlet—Balfour was not prepared to go, but he made no concealment from his colleagues of his sympathetic attitude towards Chamberlain's proposals.

It was in September that the crash came. Mr. Ritchie and the Free Trade Secretary for India, Lord George Hamilton, resigned; and, to the astonishment of the whole country, Mr. Chamberlain resigned at

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the same time, in order that he might have complete freedom to convert his countrymen to whatever gospel of sacrifice or self-interest the spirit might move him to proclaim. It was only three weeks afterwards that the ponderous workings of the Duke's mind were sufficiently advanced to enable him to decide on his own resignation. It was an event whose seriousness it would have been hard to exaggerate, for the country harboured an almost mystical faith in His Grace's soundness of judgment. Now that the great Tory Marquis was dead and the great Whig Duke had departed, the ballast seemed to have gone out of the once all-powerful Unionist Government. It was in vain that Mr. Balfour appointed Chamberlain's son to the Exchequer, and that he took advantage of the vacancy in the India Office to remove his unsuccessful War Minister to another sphere of activity—the Government had neither life in itself nor prestige in the country.

Mr. Chamberlain, confident of his ability to communicate his own enthusiasm to his audiences, addressed a series of monster meetings in the chief centres of population. Vast crowds thronged to hear and applaud him—never had his eloquence been more compelling. But it soon became evident that he was battling against a dead-weight of prejudice that even he was powerless to remove. In the Industrial North, particularly in Lancashire, Free Trade was something more than a dogma; it was a fixed habit of mind, a thing long ago decided upon and not open to discussion. And in the aftermath of the South African War, the appeal to imperial sentiment fell upon dull ears. Even in the country districts, where the offer of Protection was like a rope thrown to a drowning man, the slump in Unionist popularity was not to be arrested. The by-elections told a tale that from being ominous became catastrophic. Mr. Chamberlain appeared to have staked his all on a losing cause.

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Only his own native city remained staunchly faithful to him.

The whole country was now agog with excited discussion on questions of economics that had hitherto been relegated to the decision of specialists. If Mr. Balfour stood alone in hesitating to come to a final conclusion, his case was almost unique. Everybody else, from the retired colonel in his club to the ploughman holding forth in the bar parlour, was either a Free Trader or a Tariff Reformer, and to each and all of them, the whole matter appeared perfectly simple and capable of being settled by a few obvious generalizations.

Cries of "Your food will cost you more" were countered by others of "Tariff Reform means food and the money to pay for it," or "Tariff Reform means work for all." The cheap press was naturally to the fore in exploiting the possibilities of the situation, and in imparting to its readers the happy consciousness that they could master all the ins and outs of tariff policy without the least necessity for either knowledge of the facts, or concentrated thought. Alfred Harmsworth flung himself, with his usual passionate enthusiasm, into the fray. At first he decided that Free Food was the horse for his money, and he christened the proposed corn duty the Stomach Tax. But like Napoleon, on whose example he modelled himself, he knew that a great leader may have to change his tactical objective in the midst of a battle, and he soon, accordingly, bent all his energies, and all the wisdom and candour of his hosts of trained journalists, to the task of proving that unless John Bull would make up his mind to tax his stomach, there would be no health in him. His most important competitor, Arthur Pearson, who was engaged in forming another big newspaper combine on the Harmsworth model, was from the first on the side of Chamberlain.

Every prominent politician in the country contributed his share to the debate, and it had at least

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this advantage, that the electors were invited to exercise their minds on questions of grave national importance that had hitherto been relegated to the obscurity of bluebooks or discussed in a jargon of their own by academic specialists. These specialists did indeed make a supreme attempt to assert the authority in these matters that had been cheerfully conceded to the "classic" economists in times when Political Economy had been a euphemism for middle-class propaganda. Fourteen of its most authoritative professors launched a sort of academic Bull, enunciating *ex-cathedra*, in seven dogmatic propositions, the principles of the purest Free Trade orthodoxy. Their manifesto proved the dampest of damp squibs. Other professors, equally authoritative, rose up to proclaim that the principles of economic science sanctioned exactly opposite conclusions. Journalists employed on the Protectionist side treated the Fourteen with jeering contempt—"Fourteen Fools" was one of the phrases coined for their benefit, and the only effect of their intervention was to show the discredit into which the alleged science of Political Economy had fallen since the days of Ricardo and Mill.

Meanwhile the closing of the Liberal ranks, that the Education controversy had begun, was cemented by the threat to Free Trade. All the Liberal Imperialists, including their leader, Lord Rosebery, hastened to repudiate and abjure the fiscal Imperialism of Mr. Chamberlain, the doughtiest of all that statesman's oratorical opponents being Mr. Gladstone's former Home Secretary, Asquith, who spoke to the Free Trade brief with the dry incisiveness that had earned him his reputation at the Bar.

The most difficult task of all was that of Mr. Balfour. Apostolic fervour was not in his composition and he had too much intellectual detachment to admit of his seeing things in the sharp, contrasted colours in which they must appear to an advocate. He followed in



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the wake of Mr. Chamberlain, but at a considerable distance, and always with a certain hesitancy. He had to keep his party as well as the Empire together, and he no doubt argued that the fortunes of the two were inseparable. Mr. Balfour knew how that party had been crippled for nearly thirty years by the defection of Peel and his Free Trade following, and it would have taken very little to have provoked a secession of some seventy Unionist Free Traders, that would have condemned it to the wilderness for at least a generation. He had a part to play that required even more strength of character than that of holding down a recalcitrant Ireland. He had to temporize, to hold an unswerving middle course between the extremists of both wings. He was the target of obloquy and ridicule from every quarter; he was pilloried as a shuffler, a weakling, a Mr. Facing-Both-Ways. But he accomplished his purpose as perhaps no other leader could have done. When the Unionists suffered the overwhelming electoral defeat that everybody knew to be in store for them, they went into opposition as a united party, and it was with defeated but closed ranks that they faced the now enormous battalions of the enemy.

The country was now in a mood to put the most unfavourable construction on any action the Government might choose to take. Trades Unionists and Nonconformists were already up in arms against them, and the wrath of the so-called Temperance<sup>1</sup> supporters was aroused by a Licensing Bill, which recognized, for the first time, that a licence to sell drink was, in effect, a species of property, and that the landlord had an equitable claim to compensation in the event of its being taken away. But what caused the cup of Unionist unpopularity to overflow, was the introduction of Chinese Labour on the Rand.

<sup>1</sup> A palpable misnomer, for how can the virtue of Temperance be exercised by compulsion?

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The South African War had brought disappointment enough to the nation and discredit on its authors. But at least there had been some confidence of extracting profit from the victory. The mere fact that the Rand-lords were supposed to have engineered the quarrel for the sake of dividends shows that there was an expectation of overflowing wealth once the mines had got going under British auspices, and it was on such hopes that Milner had banked for a return of prosperity to the Transvaal under his governorship. Nothing of the sort happened. The industry continued in a state of woeful stagnation, owing, principally, to the impossibility—from various causes—of obtaining a sufficient supply of Kaffir labour.

What was to be done? To introduce white labour seemed an economic impossibility, even if the taboo on white men doing manual labour could have been successfully set aside. Milner and the Rand-lords were ready with a solution. If Kaffir labour, why not Chinese? The coolie was a cheap and reasonably efficient substitute, though it would be necessary, for obvious reasons, to keep him segregated during his sojourn on the Rand. It was only necessary to obtain the assent of the Colonial Office, at which Chamberlain's successor was a certain Mr. Alfred Lyttelton, a gentleman of great personal charm, whose principal claim to distinction was that he had once not only kept wicket for England, but had gone on, as a last resource, with lobs, and proved more successful than any bowler in the team. Mr. Lyttelton's honest soul was charmed by Milner's solution.

Accordingly, coolies were imported to the Rand, to the number, ultimately, of some hundred thousand, and were kept segregated exactly as the Kaffirs had been. The experiment, economically, was justified by results; the mines began to pay; the population of the Rand rapidly increased; skilled white labour found employment in the work of supervision; pros-

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perity once again began to smile upon the Transvaal. But the effect of the ordinance in England was to provide the pretext for just the sort of agitation that was needed to seal the fate of the Government. With the reaction against Imperialism at its height, it mattered little, and indeed was hardly noticed, that the agitation took two distinct and even contradictory forms.

One of these was based on prejudice against the Yellow Man. Chinamen, in popular legend, were associated with all manner of villainy, from cheating at cards to dark plots to overflow Westwards and exterminate very painfully the entire population of Europe. When it came out that one or two robberies on lonely farms had been committed by stray coolies, the impression was confirmed that the Government was actively forwarding what was known as the Yellow Peril, and that jobs that ought to have gone to honest whites were being assigned to these sinister beings. It was in pursuance of some such idea that Mr. Lyttelton himself was dressed up, by caricaturists, in Chinese robes, and his amiable features distorted to a slit-eyed leer.

But in an even more popular form of the agitation, the Chinaman figured, not as a peril, but as a victim—a pathetic creature sold, for greed of gain, into the most abject slavery. Every horror that imagination could devise was attributed to the compounds. Even pious Nonconformists did not hesitate to fit hymn tunes to some such words as

They stand, those gloomy compounds,  
All resonant with moans,  
The loathsome beri-beri,  
The coffins and the groans ;  
But dividends are rising,  
Park Lane is now serene,  
The mansions of the magnates  
Are decked in glorious sheen !<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from memory.

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One particularly effective cartoon represented the ghosts of a couple of Tommies gazing at a procession of fettered Chinamen, and remarking that this was not what they had thought to give their lives for.

Of the success of the agitation there could be no doubt. Hatred and pity for Chinamen, mingled, perhaps, with incipient revolt against a capitalism that had begun to transfer units of labour with the same soulless ease as units of credit, captured the soul of the electorate. Poor Mr. Lyttelton, who had never before had an enemy in the world, became the most unpopular man in the country. The Government's cup was full to overflowing—it only remained for it to go to the constituencies and drink it to the dregs.

## CHAPTER IX

### ENTENTE CORDIALE

When the Wilhelmstrasse, inspired by Holstein, had turned a final cold shoulder on Chamberlain's overtures for an alliance, England had come to a parting of ways. Should she remain stolidly faithful to Salisbury's ideal of splendid isolation, or follow the line already indicated by Chamberlain, of seeking elsewhere the friendship that the proud Teuton had offered at the price of vassalage? There was little doubt what that choice would be. Even before he retired to let his last few sands run out at Hatfield, the tired old Marquis had ceased to be much more than a dignified figurehead—the driving force behind his Government's policy was imparted by his masterful colleague from Birmingham. And Chamberlain, still smarting from Bülow's calculated snub, was not minded to turn the other cheek. "This statesman," says a German historian, "disillusioned and thrice rejected by Germany, aimed move after move, blow after blow, against her."<sup>1</sup>

This, we suspect, is putting it a little over-emphatically, for though the spirit of the policy was undoubtedly Chamberlain's, its execution was in the hands of Lord Lansdowne, the Foreign Secretary, backed as he was by a permanent staff of consummate ability. Nor had the country the nerves to have stood by the policy that had served it so well during the past century. The British elector did not feel as if he could sleep quietly in his bed unless he could think of a Continental army, like a big brother, ready

<sup>1</sup> *Germany's Road to Ruin* by Karl Nowak, p. 267.

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to take his part against the German bully. But he who takes counsel with his nerves will be impelled to avoid the perils that he knows and visualizes, by shutting his eyes to others that he realizes not yet.

A policy dictated by nerves will be one of pure egotism. Neurotic nations, like neurotic individuals, do not feel themselves strong enough to think of anything but the main chance; they have no ideals, but only interests. They are impelled to seek their own, as best they may, among other egotists equally unscrupulous. They may take to themselves allies—do not even the gangsters the same? But the worth of friendship is what can be got out of it—beyond that is only sentimentality and moonshine. You choose your friends, and your policy, as you do your investments, but with this important difference, that in the twentieth century, unlike the eighteenth, it is necessary to enlist the emotions of the mob on behalf of any scheme of policy, and though this can usually be done by the use of mass-suggestion, such emotions are not deconditioned so easily as those of M. Pavlov's much advertised dogs, and are, in fact, when sufficiently worked up, more apt to resemble those of mad dogs. Thus the nice calculation of advantages that was the essence of eighteenth-century diplomacy is no longer possible to the modern statesman.

The first move in England's new policy was, however, the result of expert calculation. A friend—as friendships are reckoned in modern statecraft—was found, not in Europe, but in the farthest East. The island kingdom of Japan, since she had had her doors blown open by shot and shell for the entrance of Western trade, had transformed herself, in an astonishingly short time, into a power on the Western model, mechanized and ruthlessly efficient. Not only had she put herself beyond any danger of being exploited, like her neighbour China, in the interests of the white capitalist, but she showed every disposition to take

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a leading part in the business of Chinese exploitation. No gang was ever more virtuously indignant at the poaching of its preserves, than were the European Powers who had already begun to stake out claims on the estate of John Chinaman. When Japan, having fallen on and soundly thrashed the unhappy Celestials, proceeded to appropriate their harbour of Port Arthur, on which Russia had counted for the warm-water terminus of her Siberian railway, the Tsar had persuaded the French and Germans to join him in preserving the integrity of China at the expense of these unlicensed intruders. He had shortly afterwards proceeded to appropriate Port Arthur according to plan, while Germany grabbed a harbour on the other side of the Yellow Sea, and England could only show her indignation by taking charge of the distinctly inferior naval base of Wei-hai-wei. Japan noted these proceedings, and bided her time for revenge with bland impassivity. Meanwhile she proceeded to exploit her victory as best she might, by taking up the Yellow Man's Burden in the quaint and Hermit Kingdom of Korea, one of her first essays in the new technique comprising the murder of the Queen.

Germany could wait—it was Russia's turn first, for that Power, taking over the ancient rôle of the Tartars, was rapidly closing in on China from the north, and not content with fastening on the rich province of Manchuria, was actually beginning to impinge upon Japan's own special preserve of Korea—and that not for any reason of high policy, but simply because certain adventurers at the Tsar's court had managed to get some timber concessions there. That these unbaptized islanders should dare offer battle to the biggest of all Christian Powers stood not within the prospect of civilized belief—but the Japanese had not studied Clausewitz for nothing. Careful preparation, followed by overwhelming violence at the selected

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point and moment, and perhaps reinforced by some timely bluff, might perhaps achieve the miracle. There was only one thing for it, and that was to key up armaments to a pitch of efficiency at which they could not possibly be sustained, and then to strike at once and strike home.

But this time the ring must be kept clear. There must be no revival of the three-Power combination—even two adversaries would be one too many. How if some European Power—how if another island Empire—could this time be induced to keep the ring for the Yellow Man? The presence of the Muscovite on the shores of the Yellow Sea was hardly less of an offence to England than to Japan. Japan, if she went to war, would be pulling the chestnuts out of the fire for England. And so long as Britannia ruled the waves, it was a fairly safe calculation that not even France would rush into a conflict she had declined at Fashoda, for the sake of Russia's *beaux yeux*.

So, after the usual hard bargaining between the parties, early in 1902 the deal was concluded. The Japanese ambassador must have smiled to himself as he drafted the first clause stating that both countries were actuated by the sole desire of maintaining the *status quo* and general peace in the Extreme East, and especially the independence and territorial integrity of China and Korea. The immediate effect of the treaty, as he well knew, was to make war with Russia a practicable policy; its ultimate effect was to pave the way for the enslavement of Korea, the appropriation of Port Arthur, and the taking over from China of as much of her Manchurian province as force and subtlety would permit. The treaty provided that if war broke out in, or about, the Far East, either party should keep the ring clear for the other, and go to war with any third Power that presumed to interfere.



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It was a piece of diplomacy on both sides that would have rejoiced the heart of Machiavelli. What would be the ultimate effect on civilization of unslipping the dogs of war in the Far East was a matter beyond the Machiavellian purview. Lord Salisbury, who was still Premier, though no longer Foreign Secretary, was by no means enthusiastic for a departure so contrary to all his instincts. But Lord Salisbury was an old man, preparing for a long journey, and he thought it best to allow his younger colleague a free hand. And the Kaiser, relieved no doubt that this first departure from England's policy of isolation should take an anti-Russian rather than an anti-German direction, professed himself highly delighted.

If the Tsar had been wise, he would have made peace with his adversary while he was still in the way with him. If Japan could have secured a free hand in her own particular Naboth's vineyard of Korea, she might—rather than have incurred the fearful risk of putting all to the touch—have been induced to wink at the Russian proceedings, at any rate in Northern Manchuria. But wisdom, in that nightmare court of St. Petersburg, was as far to seek as palm trees at the Pole. The Japanese advances were repulsed with contemptuous discourtesy, and so one night, in February, 1904, without even a declaration of war, Japanese torpedo craft dashed in among the Russian warships as they lay unsuspectingly at anchor, inflicting such injuries as to give Japan command of the sea, and the consequent initiative on land for the rest of a war in which the superstructure of Western civilization, erected by Peter the Great and his successors over the half of two continents, was shaken almost to collapse. Like the concession hunters on the Yalu, John Bull had been staking a great deal for the chestnuts the Yellow Man was pulling out of the fire for his benefit. How if the revived menace of the Tartar to the heart of Europe might be the

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not so long deferred payment for the humiliation of Tsardom in the Far East? And how if the exploiters of China should prove to have admitted to their company another Foreign Devil worse than themselves?

No such doubts troubled the complacency of Edwardian England. On all hands it was agreed that Lord Lansdowne had accomplished a brilliant stroke of diplomacy, whose wisdom was vindicated by the triumph of the Japanese arms. But before this had been accomplished, a still more important departure had been taken in British policy. The thing that Bülow and Holstein, in their short-sighted greed, had believed impossible had taken place. England and France had drawn together, and the ranging of the European forces for Armageddon had visibly begun.

The idea of any bond of sentiment uniting England and France—let alone England and Russia—might well have seemed fantastic. France had never quite forgiven England for not siding with her in 1870, and the English occupation of France's special preserve, Egypt, had been bitterly resented. In 1893, Lord Dufferin, then British ambassador at Paris, had written to the Premier, Lord Rosebery, "I am afraid that I can only describe the sentiments of French people of all classes towards us as that of unmitigated and bitter dislike. . . . Not a day passes that we are not taken to task for our sordid politics, our overbearing manners, our selfishness, our perfidy and our other inveterate bad qualities."<sup>1</sup>

Things had certainly not tended to get better since. The cup of French hatred had been filled to overflowing at the time of Fashoda; England had boiled with indignation at the prolonged scandal of the Dreyfus case; then had come the Boer War, and the insults to the Queen, and the "mud and blood" threats of the Harmsworth press. The publics of

<sup>1</sup> *British Documents on the Origins of the War*, Vol. II, p. 287.

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the two countries had been, in fact, thoroughly conditioned to hatred, ridicule and contempt of one another. And now the task was to decondition these habitual reactions and to build up a sentiment of mutual self-esteem.

It was here that the value of Edward VII as a national asset was revealed. He had not the concentration necessary for mastering the intricacies of diplomacy, and the legend of his statesmanlike genius is hardly borne out by the few and colourless minutes he affixed to State documents. But he had an unsurpassed gift of making himself popular, and what was almost unique in an Englishman, he loved and understood the Parisians. On May Day, in 1903, the King paid a State visit to a frigid and hostile Paris. Within a few days he was as popular as if he had been Henri Quatre come back to earth—Paris had taken her lover to her heart. He had not done anything theatrical or out of the ordinary—the story of his having laid himself out to woo with compliments the singers at the opera appears to be a myth. He had just gone about with his smile, and a bonhomie that was, in the best sense, Rabelaisian. He came, was seen, and the miracle of miracles happened—Anglophobia was *démodé*.

The task of the statesmen, Lansdowne and Delcassé, the French Minister, was now easy. All the differences that had kept the two countries in imminent danger of war for so many years proved capable of final adjustment, though only after the determined haggling without which no Frenchman can ever conclude a bargain. Two great nations had at last condescended to pool their differences in a way that would have been obvious common sense to any average pair of business rivals in private life. It seemed too good to be true that the many-headed anarchs could find so easy a way of seeking peace and ensuing it.

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It *was* too good to be true. If it had been a mere question of peace and goodwill between neighbours, the two might have gone on wrangling till doomsday. But this was certainly not the only, or even the main idea at the back of Delcassé's mind, or that of Chamberlain, who, though no longer in the Cabinet, still continued to supply driving force to the policy of the Unionist Government. In the extraordinary state of mind that prevailed at the beginning of the century, it was hardly possible to think of an *entente* between two great Powers without at once asking against whom it was directed. And in this case the answer was obvious—a bargain *with* France must be a bargain *at* Germany, and even at this early stage it carried some obligation of honour to back France against Germany, since nobody in his sober senses could imagine that France would have conceded anything whatever for the mere sake of peace and goodwill.

Anybody looking at a coloured map would have guessed that France had a final trick yet to secure in the almost completed game of African grab. Thanks, largely, to the complaisance of Bismarck, who had calculated, rightly, on embroiling her with England and Italy, and wrongly, on diverting her ambitions from the two lost provinces, France had now acquired an enormous empire covering most of the north-west portion of the Continent. But in the extreme north-west corner there was still a native Power whose immunity from absorption was a crying anomaly. This was the so-called Empire of Morocco, and there was little enough about it to excite either sentiment or sympathy. The country was backward and squalid to the last degree, and the so-called Emperor was so little able to keep order that not even the outskirts of Tangier were free from the activities of brigands. It was a clear case for what was euphemistically known as peaceful penetration, that is to say for appropri-

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tion, civilization, and exploitation, by some European power. And why not France—thus neatly rounding off that North-West African Empire?

It was not quite so simple as all that. In the first place, there was Spain, on the opposite shore, who considered herself to have a right to at least an equal share in the pickings of civilization. Then there were the other Continental Powers, who naturally preferred an open door for their trade and capital. Lastly there was England, who had a special interest in keeping France away from the old pirate bases on the Atlantic seaboard, and most of all from the coast opposite Gibraltar. If there had to be a share-out, she would have preferred to put in a claim of her own to her ancient possession of Tangier and a strip of coast which, in conjunction with Gibraltar, would have enabled her to bottle up the Mediterranean against whoever she pleased. She was, in short, little more friendly to French penetration of Morocco, than France to the English occupation of Egypt. To the Emperor of Morocco, England was so obviously the friend and protector, that in 1901 a mission was dispatched and received in great state by Edward VII. It is humanly certain that if Chamberlain could have only struck his bargain with Bülow, England and Germany would have been found working hand in glove to veto French designs on Morocco.

The bargain of 1904, not all of which was revealed to the world, included a simple agreement for a free British hand in Egypt in return for a free French hand in Morocco, as sensible and unsentimental an arrangement as if Dick Turpin had covenanted with Claude Duval: "You take the high road and I'll take the low road," or, as Wilfred Scawen Blunt put it, "It is clear now that the two Governments understand it as a division of spoils, not quite complete but to be so in the near future."<sup>1</sup> But perhaps this was

<sup>1</sup> *Diaries*, p. 509.

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not quite all. The question might even arise of how far the honour of the high road, which was certainly not inferior to that of civilized Powers in the twentieth century, bound Dick to go to Claude's aid in case of his civilizing activities being interfered with by third parties.

There was no doubt what interpretation suited Germany's interests. By sheer ineptitude and short-sighted cunning she had brought within the realm of practical politics the contingency that she had most reason to dread. For now that England and France had come together, it was only one more step to bringing about a similar *rapprochement* between England and Russia. Chamberlain had, in fact, actually suggested to Delcassé that he should work for this end, and, "when I heard this," said Delcassé, "I felt my brain turning." The Triple Alliance—perhaps not even triple, for Italian loyalty was already on the wane—would then be faced by a Triple Entente, capable, if it could be brought into the field, of reversing the verdict of 1870.

But there were still winning cards in Germany's hand, had she known how to play them. Now that Russia was reeling under blow after blow from Japan, and now that England was holding back France from going to her ally's support, tension between England and Russia had become more acute than ever, and war might at any moment have broken out between them. With Russian resources strained almost to breaking-point, the Dual Alliance was practically out of action, and it was impossible that the grey legions could have afforded any substantial help to France.

It required less than Bismarckian intelligence to see that two clear alternatives presented themselves to Germany. She could have reverted to Bismarck's half-formed plan of 1875, and taken this golden opportunity for cutting the knot with the sword. Such was the solution favoured by that able and ruth-

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less Chief of her General Staff, von Schlieffen. To his calculating brain, it was a matter of mathematical certainty that the French Army—whose efficiency was known to be at no very high level—could be pulverized within a few weeks from mobilization. The English Army, still awaiting effective reorganization, and unprepared for co-operation with the French, could hardly have made any serious difference. On the principles of Clausewitz, the obvious and only course was to have seized any or no pretext for an instant and final settlement with France.

This, if the legend had been well founded of a ruthless determination on the part of Germany to select her own moment for falling on her neighbours and achieving world-mastery, would certainly have been done. But the Kaiser, Bülow and Holstein were not men of iron like Schlieffen. To stake everything on the tremendous gamble of war was contrary to their deepest instincts. The Kaiser's own idea of being a happy warrior was to collect all the cavalry on both sides at manœuvres, and then, on a horse that had been carefully practised over the ground, to head a spectacular charge, with thunder of hooves and hurrahs, cuirasses scintillating in the sunlight, and loyal regiments of infantry hastening to lay down their arms. His ministers were equally happy in carrying on from moment to moment with the game of diplomatic finesse which they lacked the wit to realize how woefully they had bungled.

If it was not to be war, then the obvious alternative was to prevent the agreement between Britain and France from developing into an alliance. The vital thing to avoid was an aggressive or threatening attitude that would drive them to seek each other's support. It was not likely that English policy would aim at further entanglement with that of the Dual Alliance, without definite provocation. Let the sun shine, and the traveller would need no cloak to pro-

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tect him. But the German capacity for finding and doing the most inept possible thing was not exhausted. Bülow, if he was not prepared to fight, was not afraid to bluster. France should be reminded, in no uncertain terms, of her weakness. And Germany, which had an excellent case in Morocco, would make it clear that she was going to prosecute it, not by argument nor persuasion, but by *force majeure*.

Accordingly, on the 31st of March, 1905, there was enacted at the port of Tangier a scene to which a Gilbert or an Offenbach would have found it hard to do justice. The Emperor of Germany landed from his yacht to pay a call in state on his good brother of Morocco. It is only fair to William to acknowledge that even his not conspicuously balanced judgment would have preserved him from this exploit. But Bülow, among whose brightest ideas it was, was remorselessly determined not to let his master off. He got it announced in the press that the visit would take place—it would never do to back out now. Would it not be said—"Lo, Cæsar is afraid"? Poor Cæsar was indeed afraid, not without cause. As he subsequently complained to Bülow—"I landed because you wanted me to . . . mounted a strange horse in spite of the impediment that my crippled left arm caused to my riding, and the horse was within an inch of costing me my life"<sup>1</sup>—in spite of its being named "Dove of Peace." Thus mounted, and with a German general foot-slogging valiantly on either hand, His Imperial Majesty set forth in the midst of a chattering excited mob of the Sultan's bodyguard who brandished loaded and bayoneted rifles all round him, through the narrow streets of the Moslem town, with their dust and smells and the delighted clamour with which so unique a circus could not fail to be greeted. At one point of the route a novel attraction was provided by the presence of a ragged band

<sup>1</sup> *Bülow Memoirs*, English Translation, Vol. II, p. 140.



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of Spanish anarchists, who, as the Kaiser's presence was believed to be distasteful to their own Alphonso, decided to greet him by throwing caps instead of bombs. The whole affair, including lunch at the German Embassy, a *feu de joie* that nearly brought about the dreaded cropper, and an audience with the Sultan's uncle—for the Sultan himself was nowhere to be seen—lasted for some two hours, but in the course of it the Kaiser had fired off a brief oration, the product not of his own brain but of Bülow's, proclaiming, in terms of studied defiance to France, his intention of championing the Sultan's independence. And then, declining a pressing invitation to witness a spectacle of dances and combats on horseback, the Supreme War Lord regained the safety of his yacht, only too glad to find himself still alive.<sup>1</sup> If nobody had laughed at this performance, there was an old man with a scythe who must have grinned.

Bülow had jeopardized his master's life, so he informed him on his return, in order to see whether France would mobilize. As she had declined to be drawn, he had followed up his imagined advantage with a display of blustering violence at Paris. The whole question of Morocco must be submitted to a European Conference. France would have been ready to concede Germany better terms by private bargain than she could have hoped to get out of any Conference, but her rival was adamant. Delcassé, who would have stood firm, even at the hazard of war, was forced to resign. France made a virtue of necessity, accepted the Conference, and bided her time. Germany had scored a point of less than no practical value to herself, and the real effect of her action was shown by visits of the English and French fleets to each other's ports, amid tempestuous popular enthusiasm. Fear of the jack-boot was imparting a militant complexion to the Entente.

<sup>1</sup> Nowak, op. cit., pp. 293-9.

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The year 1905 was to see the Imperial comedian in another rôle. Fate, whose forbearance appeared to be inexhaustible, had afforded Germany one more chance of retrieving her position, and repairing that wire to St. Petersburg that had been so wantonly cut after Bismarck's dismissal. The Tsardom had been shaken to its foundations. The war in the Far East had gone according to plan—the Japanese plan. The Tsar had got little good from the French alliance, and was seething with indignation against England. This had been raised to boiling-point by an incident that had brought the two powers to the very brink of war.

In the autumn of 1904, the Russian Baltic Fleet, a scratch collection of vessels only formidable on paper, had, after many delays, at last got under way for the Far East. From the first, the prevailing state of mind among all ranks was one of nervous apprehension arising from a just sense of their own incompetence. Even in these peaceful waters, the terror of the Japanese was upon them. As the untrained look-outs peered anxiously over the night sea, phantom torpedo-boats rose on the crest of every wave. At last, when this neurotic armada, expecting every moment to be attacked, steamed into the midst of a fleet of English trawlers, peacefully fishing on the Dogger Bank, a new and unique battle honour was added to the records of the Russian Navy. Disdaining surrender, the warships started blazing away at the trawlers and each other, inflicting a number of casualties, though not on the Japanese, the range being one of several thousand miles. After some half an hour of this work, the Russian fleet succeeded in getting clean away, too thankful for its own safety to have any thought of giving assistance to the sinking trawler that testified to the efficiency of its gunnery.

When the news reached England, the whole coun-

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try was not unnaturally furious with indignation at what was regarded as a cowardly murder, and a cry went up for vengeance. For the moment it seemed as if an Anglo-Russian war, with all its immeasurable potentialities of disaster, was about to break out—Lord Charles Beresford, standing across the Russian path with the Channel Fleet, made no secret of his eagerness to send the whole lot to Davy Jones. But there were cooler heads at Whitehall, and the Tsar, who had no stomach for war with a new adversary, did the gentlemanly thing, promised such reparation as was in his power, and consented to the conduct of his officers being submitted to a Court of Arbitration, whereupon he was permitted to forward these unhappy victims of his orders to the certain doom that awaited them at the hands of Admiral Togo.

But though the Tsar had spoken smooth things, black hatred was in his heart. How indeed could the man who had cheerfully gone on with his coronation pageantry and junketings after some thousands of his subjects had been trampled to death under his eyes, be expected to sympathize with all this fuss about a few wretched fishermen? Quite obviously it was a supreme exhibition of British cant and enmity to Russia. No words were too bad for "the mangy enemy," as Nicholas was pleased to characterize his future allies.

Further troubles were in store for the Tsar. Not only was the war going from bad to worse, but the home front was collapsing. A crowd of impoverished working people came to seek redress of their grievances from their Little Father, who slipped off out of harm's way, and left the most brutal of his uncles to shoot down a thousand or so of them as they stood unarmed in front of his Palace. Then, one afternoon, as His Majesty was playing tennis, his game was interrupted for a moment by a telegram announcing

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the practical annihilation of the Baltic Fleet in the Straits of Tsushima. Port Arthur had already fallen, and in a final great battle the Russian army was forced to fall back in good order from the Manchurian capital. Their enemy, if the Russians had only known it, had shot his bolt. The clever Japanese wrestler had forced the bear to give ground, but he remained locked in the brute's embrace. The hitherto victorious army could not advance and dared not retreat—it could only have stuck fast in its trenches till exhaustion had done its work.

But could the Tsardom itself hold out so long? Even before the War the state of the country had beggared description; now it was degenerating into naked anarchy. Everywhere mansions were being burnt and their owners murdered; a Grand Duke was blown to pieces in the streets of Moscow; an appointment to a provincial governorship was not far short of a sentence of death; and the confusion was worse confounded by massacres organized on behalf of Church and State by the Black Hundreds. A constitution was granted, which did not appear likely to work, but which still further weakened the prestige of the Tsardom. The time was ripe for the Japanese to play their last card, and by a show of sweeping concessions, bluff the Russians into concluding a peace giving them Port Arthur, the railway to Mukden, and a free hand to deal with the wretched Koreans, whose fate mattered to no one but themselves.

It was little short of a miracle that the crazy fabric of Tsardom did manage to hold together for a few more years. But the Tsar's necessity was the Kaiser's opportunity. Only after the War did the world know of the strange correspondence that had been intermittently carried on between these two mighty rulers. The Kaiser was fully confident of his power to twist his simple cousin round his thumb—reading some of the letters one is reminded of the overwhelming

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geniality of the gentleman in the train, who invites some unsuspicious stranger to spot the lady. It was when the peace negotiations were just about to begin that Willy—as he used to sign himself—suggested to Nicky how nice it would be if they could meet and talk things over. This was best done on board ship, as a visit to the Autocrat on land was likely to be enlivened by Nihilists. Accordingly the two royal yachts met at Bjorkoe, off the coast of Finland, and the Kaiser prepared to bring off the master-stroke of his reign. After the usual salutes, inspections, and so forth, he got the Tsar alone in his cabin, and presented him with a treaty, which he hastily drafted, providing for a defensive alliance between Germany and Russia. Nicholas, probably more for the sake of feeling he was doing something to assert himself than for any other cause, suggested that a couple of words should be inserted limiting the scope of the treaty to Europe; the Kaiser thought this an excellent idea. It would be “a jolly memento of our meeting,” he went on to suggest, if Nicky would just append his autograph there and then. The Tsar, nothing loath, took his pen, signed, and then fell into his cousin’s arms, blessing God and Willy in one breath. It is usual for such important documents to be signed by ministers, as well as sovereigns, but this was no bar, for the Kaiser had one in attendance who was ready to put his name obediently to anything that was set before him, and the Tsar, having no minister handy, called in an old deaf Admiral, who kissed the Kaiser’s hand, gasping out what an honour it was to sign a document of such importance.<sup>1</sup>

Such was the episode of Bjorkoe, one of the turning-points in the world’s history. For in the hands of wise men this document, crude and underhand as it was, might have been turned into an instrument for the salvation of Europe. A pact of mutual

<sup>1</sup> Nowak, *op. cit.*, pp. 311–17.

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defence and non-aggression between Germany and Russia, added to the one between France and Germany, might, if France could have been induced to agree, have led to the inclusion of the Dual and Triple Alliances in one league of Continental Powers, which the British Empire, and perhaps ultimately the United States, might have been induced to join, thus laying the foundations of a world federation capable of guaranteeing peace.

It is hardly necessary to say that such thoughts were far from the minds of the monarchs whom so honest an arrangement would have saved from unutterable tragedy. The treaty was only another move in the interminable skin game that they had been taught to play, and call it statesmanship. The Kaiser returned home proud of having checkmated England by forming that very combination against her that he had claimed credit for frustrating during the South African War—for he had no doubt that France, confronted with the *fait accompli* of the treaty, would be compelled to come in. Bülow, immediately he heard what had been done, wired fulsome congratulations to his master and went off to consult his friend Holstein. That innocent last moment insertion of the words “in Europe”—could it be that the simple Nicky had outwitted his cousin after all? For as Herr Nowak writes of Bülow, “the thing that mattered to him was not the peace of Europe . . . if Germany was to be unable to ask Russia to make trouble for Britain in India the whole agreement was valueless.” And so, without warning, Bülow presented the Kaiser with his resignation. The effect on the amazed Emperor of seeing his dream castle thus tumbled in ruins was to produce a violent brain-storm.

“Wire to me,” he begged piteously, “the word ‘All right’ and I shall know you will stay! For the morning after your resignation has been received,

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would find your Emperor alive no longer. Think of my poor wife and children.”<sup>1</sup>

There were other wives and children whose interests were at stake.

A similar process of disillusionment had meanwhile been going on in St. Petersburg. A combination of uncles and ministers was not long in indicating to the Tsar that he was in the position of a lady who, being affianced to one suitor, accepts a proposal from another. They knew enough of the world to realize that it was not only for the sake of peace that France had entered into the Dual Alliance. And to double-cross an ally in this way was one of the things that was not done—at least with impunity. Nicholas was fortunately in the habit of saying “Yes” to whatever he was told with sufficient insistence, and he made little more difficulty in abandoning the treaty than he had in signing it.

And so, with both parties beginning to hedge and raise their terms, the treaty was soon waste paper; Nicholas, his trust in Willy turned to resentful suspicion, began to look for friends elsewhere than in Germany, and another, perhaps the decisive step, had been taken on the road to Armageddon.

<sup>1</sup> *Bülow Memoirs*, Vol. II, pp. 140-1.





## BOOK II

# THE EDWARDIAN SPIRIT

### CHAPTER I

#### BANKRUPT ORTHODOXY

The reaction against the Victorian Age, and all that it signified, gathered momentum with every passing year. It was not only that imperialist politics had gone out of fashion with the South African fiasco, but that the whole universe, as the Victorians had understood it, was undergoing transformation. It was as if the Atlas who held up the cosmos were discovered to be kneeling upon something more tenuous than air.

The Victorian Rationalists had contrived to substitute a very simple and common-sense universe for that of Genesis. There was Space that went on for ever, Time that had already gone on for ever and would do so again, providing an ample stage for the drama of cosmic evolution. The caste was conveniently simple—there was Matter, an eternally fixed quantity of which had always existed in the form of solid indivisible units called atoms ; there was Energy, which had likewise always existed, and yet had somehow for ever and ever been dissipating itself into space, so that the universe was an even more wonderful piece of mechanism than Paley's watch, for though it had never ceased to run down and there was no one to wind it up, it somehow continued to go. And then there was Gravity, which functioned, Newton knew how, and God knew why—or might have

known if He had existed. And finally, Evolution, which meant that once Matter and Energy had been turned loose into the universe, such a world as we see and such men as we are would sooner or later be bound to happen, Darwin having accounted for the not unimportant final transition from mud to Man, thereby bowing God out of a universe whose explanation seemed less difficult to swallow when you thought of what simple materials it was composed—especially if you were an Agnostic, and had faith that nobody could ever possibly know how they had got there.

This was usually what Victorian Rationalism amounted to, though not exactly how it was put—the Victorians were far too decent to express themselves thus crudely. It made it somehow less hard to be deprived of God, free will, and immortality, if you thought what a very solid and straightforward going concern the universe turned out to be.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Rationalism—to give it its most popular name—had come down into the market-place and entered into active competition with the older faiths, a competition in which it enjoyed the advantage of a more than Islamic simplicity. It had its own jargon; if you did not hold its tenets whole and undefiled, you were intellectually out of it, branded, in fact, as an Obscurantist. You could only be a Freethinker by renouncing your freedom to think in any but one way. And the mere repetition of the word Science had something of the effect of an incantation—faith in Science had come to replace the old faith in God. The recognized prophet of Science was at this time a German biologist called Haeckel, whose *Riddle of the Universe*, translated into English, and brought out in a sixpenny edition, stated the extreme Rationalist case in a form of monistic pantheism—the sum of all natural forces being God, life a function of carbon and mind of

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matter—and with a sweeping aggressiveness of generalization that made it ideal propaganda.

Science had, in fact, for purposes of popular controversy, come to mean much the same thing as biology. Evolution was the most used and abused catchword of the time, and it was almost always biological evolution that was on the *tapis*. It is a curious fact, of which explanations may differ, that while the masters of physical science quite frequently tend to be believers—Kelvin, for instance, Clerk Maxwell, Stokes, Stuart, and Tait—the science of life seems to have a precisely opposite effect on its devotees. There is an old proverb, *ubi medicus, ibi atheus*, or “once a doctor, an atheist”, which, though a gross exaggeration if applied to the workaday G.P., comes nearer the truth when for practising doctor we substitute biological specialist. It would seem that the contemplation of the starry universe conduces more readily to belief in a soul than attendance at post-mortems.

A formidable attack had developed against the citadel of established faith along another line. It seemed as if the whole historical foundation of orthodox Christianity were in process of being undermined. The situation must have appeared hopeless indeed, when among the assailants were some of the official defenders, beneficed ecclesiastics holding important offices. It was no longer a question of Bishop Colenso getting tied up by a Zulu in a controversy about Noah's ark, but of the very rock on which the edifice of faith had hitherto reposed. St. Paul had explicitly assured his Corinthian converts that if Christ had not risen from the dead, both his preaching and their faith were in vain, but now there were ministers of religion—notably the great Biblical scholar Canon Cheyne—who thought nothing whatever of basing the whole resurrection story not upon fact, but upon folk-lore. This same Canon was editor

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of an *Encyclopædia Biblica*, that went further in its destructive criticism of Holy Writ than most avowed Rationalists would have dared. It mattered little that the good Canon had earned the reputation, among his fellow-scholars, of a philological crank, and had got into the habit of using the blessed word *Jerahmeel* as a master key to unlock all the mysteries of Old Testament study. The fact remained that whereas the mild and reverent speculations of clerical Essayists and Reviewers in the sixties had fluttered all the ecclesiastical dovecots in England, this twentieth-century Canon could proceed on his iconoclastic way, and hardly an eyebrow be raised.

It was not that the ordinary parson was particularly interested in either evolution or the Higher Criticism. He, poor man, slaving at what was usually a thankless and underpaid job, had other things to think about. Adam and Eve provided good enough material for an occasional sermon, and to inquire too closely into differences between Elohist and Jahvist texts would have been asking for even more trouble than the daily round was apt to provide. If he wanted controversy, the technique of his profession would surely provide. As for the rising tide of infidelity, he was no Canute to say—"Thus far shalt thou come, and no further."

But the tide continued to rise, so gradually that it always seemed to be standing still, until you noticed that first this familiar object and then that was no longer visible. And the ripples broke with petulant froth ever higher upon the sand. Anyone who wished to understand the spirit of the times could not have done better than to have visited Hyde Park, on a fine evening, about the middle of the nineteen-hundreds. There he would have seen anything up to a dozen mob orators, each holding forth from his separate rostrum. It is remarkable that the overwhelming majority of these men elected to hold forth not on

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social but on religious questions. The most popular platform of all would not infrequently be that of some militant anti-Christian. This was no doubt partly due to the fact that the infidel exercised the privilege of being the funny man, thus putting the reverend or merely reverent defender of the faith at an unfair disadvantage.

"I start from the assumption," some earnest young curate, fresh from Oxford, would say, "that the Emperor Nero died about thirty years before the spread of the Christian religion."

"Ho yus!" would interject his adversary, "shows his sense, that did," and a round of laughter would register this doctrinal score.

It was a strange form of debate, this in which the audience drifted indifferently from group to group, sampling Catholic and Calvinist, Agnostic and Humanitarian Deist, more intent on being amused than anything else, and yet the attacks made by these fantastic orators on religion merely exaggerated, to the point of caricature, what had already been said by the leaders of Free Thought. Evolution was proclaimed as an infallible gospel based on authority. Biblical criticism was concentrated almost invariably on the Pentateuch, not without broad witticisms about "old Lot" and "old Nor". There was an occasional tendency to associate Free Thought with the propaganda of class hatred—it was thought no inconsistency to fling at some gowned and cadaverous ascetic the taunt that the priest was the fat man, *par excellence*. Occasionally some God-defying zealot would land himself in jail; for the law against blasphemy was so interpreted as only to be enforced against those who had not had the education to be godless within the bounds of good taste. There was one celebrated individual, plying, if I remember right, the incongruous craft of tailor's cutter, who emerged from more than one temporary retirement

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with a martyr's determination to make up for arrears.

It may seem a far cry from such crude evangelists to the intensely earnest and respectable men who stood at the head of the Rationalist movement, but every doctrine has to go through such process of vulgarization before it can be received by the mob. And if, by the time that Victorian Rationalism had percolated down to the lowest strata, it was already passing out of date on the heights of culture, such stalwarts as Edward Clodd and Mr. Joseph McCabe had built their tabernacles on the rock of nineteenth-century biology, and until they were gathered to Haeckel's bosom, they at least could be relied upon to stand fast in that faith.

Few of the younger generation affected the combative attitude towards Christianity that had been fashionable when Huxley had stood forth like Ajax, defying the thunders of Hawarden and Sinai, or when there had been talk of prosecuting the leading evolutionists. To hostility had succeeded a patronage that was more deadly by far. You did not trouble to disprove religion, you sympathetically—even affectionately—explained it away. While clergymen were defying the law and each other in the endeavour to adopt or prevent the practice of “reserving” the consecrated elements in some side chapel, where they could be adored, out of service hours, by a few earnest old maids and others whose emotions were that way inclined, such profound scholars as Sir James Frazer were beginning to class the Eucharist as one of many variants of the time-honoured practice of eating the God. The awful mysteries of the faith one by one came to be regarded as mysterious no longer, but rather as entirely human developments, not without their human beauty and pathos.

It was becoming no longer a question, as it had been in Victorian times, of “If the Lord be God,

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serve him; and if Science, serve her." You might comfortably contrive to serve both. The Lord might be admittedly an up-to-date version of Yahweh, the Storm-god of Sinai, but that was no reason for attacking, or even leaving, the Church. Sir James Frazer might explain away a Sacrament—that was his business—it did not in the least affect the legality of reserving it. If one might take a slight liberty with Mr. Belloc's lines one might thus summarize the most popular attitude in the new century to religious controversy :

And is it true? It is not true!  
But even so it's got to do,  
For people such as me and you.

This was, at any rate, the attitude enjoined by the most fashionable philosophy of the time, which, born in America, became domiciled in the Common Rooms of Oxford. It was called Pragmatism, and it was based on the denial of any such thing as absolute truth. A thing was true, not because it was, but because it worked—giving a new point to the Irishman's phrase, "True for you." You might accept the Lord or the Sacrament pragmatically, without bothering what they were, or were not, historically. To a genuine Victorian, whether he were Christian or Rationalist, such a standpoint would have been unintelligible. Either there was or there wasn't a God; the Resurrection was fact or fiction—you couldn't have it both ways. Whereas now, when you said "I believe", all that it might really amount to was that you were exploiting the advantages of making believe.

"Do we believe?" was, in fact, so burning a question, that it formed the subject of the greatest newspaper controversy of modern times, that ran, for the last quarter of 1904, in the columns of the *Daily Telegraph*. It was calculated that if all the letters and sermons had been printed, they would have filled

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no less than 2,500 columns of the newspaper. The general impression to be derived from the printed Babel was that faith was becoming rather the exception than the rule among laymen who thought for themselves, and a notorious decline in the habit of church-going, especially among men, together with the increasing difficulty in finding candidates for ordination, told the same tale of belief on the wane. It would hardly have been too much to say that Christianity was rapidly ceasing to exercise any serious influence on the national life, except in so far as it provided a means of emotional solace for individuals.

This did not prevent numerous attempts, of a more or less sensational nature, from being made to whip up the old evangelical fervour. In Wales, a young enthusiast, called Evan Roberts, who believed that he had been able, night after night, to speak face to face with the Deity for hours on end, accepted a commission from this source to evangelize his fellow-countrymen. Mr. Roberts had even more remarkable and agitating experiences—"When I go out in the garden," he confided, "I see the devil grinning at me, but I am not afraid of him . . ." and with such a tale to tell it is no wonder that he was able to excite his hearers to transports of emotional enthusiasm by no means unfamiliar in that land of revivals, and hardly to be surpassed even in the plantations of the South. But it is more than doubtful whether the least permanent effect is produced by such crude doses of spiritual excitement.

In the following year, 1905, a couple of American Revivalists, called Torrey and Alexander, made a startling effort to repeat the success of Sankey and Moody. But the tenderness of the earlier evangelists, and the haunting appeal of such hymns as "Tell me the old, old story," were not things to be reproduced to order. Dr. Torrey was a hard and intolerant Fundamentalist, who believed in the literal inspiration of every word



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of Scripture and in the hottest and most literal of eternal torture-houses. Those who ventured to differ from him on these points were branded not only as infidels, but as living in sin. Sin, to Dr. Torrey, was a pretty comprehensive term. "Would you," he thundered, "like to have Christ find you in the theatre? Would you like to have Christ find you in the ballroom? Would you like Christ to find you at the card table?" An answer in the negative was obviously expected by Dr. Torrey. But the Revival had all the momentary success of a well-boasted stunt. Great audiences roared themselves hoarse to the altruistic strains of:

There will be glory, glory for me!

while three converted young men in Halifax were announced to have formed themselves into a committee to pray for seven ministers who had protested against the Evangelists' proceedings. But, as is the way of stunts, the excitement died down as rapidly as it had arisen. Fundamentalism was not destined to strike root on English soil.

At the other extreme the High Church, now coming to be known as Anglo-Catholic, and approximating more and more closely to the Roman practice, continued to gain ground within the Anglican fold. This movement had suffered a sharp setback in the nineties by the failure of what had seemed a promising attempt to get back into the Roman communion on a federal basis. That charming old scion of the Roman aristocracy, Pope Leo XIII, had been benevolently disposed towards the idea of recognizing the validity of Anglican Orders—not so his representative in England, Cardinal Vaughan, who was scandalized at the suggestion, and, in the urbane style proper to theological controversy, characterized Anglicans who aped the practices of Catholicism as marionettes of Satan. To these marionettes the road to Rome was accord-

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ingly barred once for all by Papal decree, and he must be sanguine indeed who imagines that the Holy See will extend its recognition to a hyphenated Catholicism.

This repulse by no means damped the ardour of the Anglo-Catholics, who, if they could not be Roman, could at least Romanize to their hearts' content within the elastic bonds of Anglican discipline. Archbishop Tait's Act for the restraining of these practices had proved an absolute failure, and though a Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline produced a bulky report in 1906, it had not the smallest effect in restraining any parson who liked to be a law unto himself and become what Catholic and Protestant would for once have been agreed in describing as a marionette of Satan. All this was only part of the universal tendency towards extreme and aggressive militancy in every department of life. It was appropriately countered by a school of Protestants, who were equally determined to stick at nothing in order to enforce a conformity, that the Bishops could not or would not, to Reformation principles. Their leader was a certain Mr. Kensit, a draper's assistant turned publisher, who organized a band of earnest young men to stand up for Jesus by brawling in as many Ritualist churches as possible. Mr. Kensit was pursuing this stormy career at Liverpool, when a fellow-Christian, of like spirit but presumably differing opinions, launched a chisel with so true an aim that the Reformer was taken to hospital, where he died, though apparently from a different cause, so that his claim to a martyr's crown must remain in suspense.

What a game it was ! must be the reflection of any impartial spectator. These disputants lived in a world of their own, a world of pure make-believe, while the spirit of individual and collective egotism reigned supreme and almost unchallenged, driving the nations headlong to the suicide of civilization, and Christianity,

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with its authority undermined, had apparently no message of salvation for distracted humanity, but could only offer one of several competing brands of emotional dope.

## CHAPTER II

### THE LOPSIDEDNESS OF SCIENCE

If you had read any popular résumé of the progress of science late in the nineteenth century, you might have been struck by the constant recurrence of the word "Evolution". It is what, to the man in the street, science was most concerned about in its conflict with religion. But if, during the first decade of the twentieth century, you had tried to keep yourself *au fait* with the latest developments, you would have found another word occurring with equal or greater frequency. That word was Radium. And Radium had come to stand for the symbol of a veritable revolution, whose nature and consequences were as yet but dimly appreciated.

Already, before the end of the nineteenth century, everybody was talking about the wonderful X-rays, that enabled you to take a photograph of your sitter's skeleton, a practical demonstration of beauty being only skin deep that provided a useful plot for more than one up-to-date magazine writer. But these feats were but a prelude to something infinitely more momentous, for following up this line of discovery, scientists were not only able to investigate the inside of a solid body, but to find an inside to what had hitherto passed for the solid and indivisible atom. The discovery was similar to that of the revellers in *The Masque of the Red Death*, who, after pursuing the ghostly intruder from room to room, and finally cornering him and tearing off his mask and robe, found beneath them—nothing.

So with the atom. Far from being hard and solid,

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it turned out to be a reproduction in miniature of a vast vacancy containing a solar system, with planets no bigger in proportion than motes of dust in a cathedral, performing their evolutions round a tiny sun! But here the resemblance to sun and planets ended, for these motes were not solid things, nor indeed things at all, in any intelligible sense of the word, but tiny centres of electric energy—knots, as some scientists tried to explain it, in an all-pervasive and quite inconceivable ether. It was not yet known that these unthinkable planets had the even more wildly unthinkable power of jumping from orbit to orbit without passing through any of the space between.

To Herbert Spencer the annihilation of matter had been not only impossible, but a sheer inconceivability, as if 2 and 2 had made 3. But this newly discovered element, radium, was constantly radiating off minute portions of its unsubstantial substance, and the result was written off the books of matter as dead loss. "Mass", as Mr. Balfour put it, in his 1904 Presidential Address to the British Association, "is not only explicable, it is actually explained. So far from being an attribute of matter, considered in itself, it is due . . . to the relation between the electrical monads of which matter is composed and the ether in which they are bathed. So far from being unchangeable, it changes, when moving at very high speeds, with every change in its velocity."

All of which may have seemed of essentially technical interest, with no very obvious bearings on the claims of science to supersede religion by providing a sufficient answer to the riddle of the universe and a programme of salvation for mankind. There was more to excite than to relieve doubt in the thought of the physical basis of the universe being something not even imaginable. But if the atom had been dissolved, the solid and simple cosmos of the Victorian

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Rationalists had dissolved with it. Now that matter had ceased to be eternal, and time and space themselves were beginning to be called in question, it was at least more difficult to be cocksure about the capacity of average common sense to conquer all knowledge and all mysteries. The universe was, at any rate, a good deal less obvious than it had seemed to the great Freethinking Fathers whose works the Rationalist Press was popularizing in a series of admirable cheap reprints. There might yet be odd corners in which mystery could lurk—and perhaps a background of mystery behind it all. And out of it, perhaps, God, speaking as He spoke out of the whirlwind to Job. Or perhaps merely a vague feeling of awe, a religious emotion without any religion to fix it.

There was one consequence that, though perhaps not logical, had some practical importance. The shifting of interest from biology to physics had the effect of bringing the masters of physical science into the limelight, men less disposed to a dogmatic Rationalism than their comrades the biologists. Oliver Lodge was a seeker of an altogether different type from that of Ray Lankester.

But even in biology, the old Victorian confidence was beginning to evaporate. The greatness of Darwin became even more apparent as his figure receded into historical perspective, but the idea that natural selection was capable of accounting for all the facts of evolution, or that blind chance could possibly have effected the transition from mud to Man, was seen to be untenable, or at least premature. Darwin, like so many other scientists before him, had provided a working hypothesis that was justified—as the new school of philosophers would have put it—pragmatically, by the fact of its having stimulated progress in every department of biological science. Not even the most intransigent anti-Darwinian dreamed of putting back the clock to pre-Darwinian theory. But a working

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hypothesis is by no means the same thing as a final explanation, and it is no disparagement to Darwin to point out that he had but demonstrated the convenience, for most practical purposes, of assuming that species had originated in a certain way. But that he had proved such a development to have actually taken place, or succeeded in reconciling the whole of the facts with his hypothesis, was unscientific over-belief.

In the latter half of Queen Victoria's reign had flourished, not very conspicuously, an impish person whose delight it had been to bait the orthodox of both the religious and scientific camps. This Samuel Butler had had the impertinence to fire off at the Darwinians the simple conundrum—"How did the chicken learn to get out of the egg?" It was just such a question as the Almighty might have put to Job. But neither Darwin nor his apostles had the patience of Job, and they refused to give this outsider a serious or even a courteous hearing, in which they were perhaps wise—for the question was, from their standpoint, unanswerable. How *did* the chicken know?

There were various other conundrums that would have been equally hard to answer. By what process of natural selection was a butterfly enabled to paint his wing so as exactly to resemble a dead leaf, and what is more, a torn and disreputable leaf? It would be about as easy to imagine Ruskin's famous libel to be literally true, and that by throwing paint at canvas often enough, in the dark, you would presently hit upon a nocturne in blue and silver—or a Sistine Madonna. How did the electric eel get his battery, an organ that would have been a useless encumbrance for all the many generations that it was in process of completion? How did the various species of orchids, that Darwin himself had investigated, contrive such subtle and complicated plots as those by which they sought to secure fertilization of

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their stock? Bergson summed up the situation admirably when he described Darwinian selection as the building of houses by throwing stones.

Paley's famous comparison of the Universe to a watch on a heath, and his deduction of a watchmaker, may or may not have been sound reasoning, but if Paley could have come back to earth he would hardly have been convinced of his error, if he had been told that subsequent research had proved the watch to have been more wonderfully and intricately constructed than even he had suspected.

There remained the final question—how did life originate at all? The production of living from non-living matter continued to baffle the utmost ingenuity of scientists, and blind faith was the only thing to invoke, in default of an old-fashioned Creator, if the gap was to be bridged. At some time in the earth's history conditions *must* have existed to make the thing possible, and blind chance must have possessed a capacity it has apparently lost of making dead matter live. To say frankly that one could not fit this most vital of all transitions into one's scheme of the universe would have been too painful an admission. Blessed are they who have not proved and yet have believed!

The fact that Darwin was one of the greatest of all scientists did not prevent science from progressing beyond Darwin. But this by no means implied a swing back to any God conceivable by the Victorian orthodox. It was one thing to rule out blind chance as a sufficient explanation; it was quite another to cover the facts of evolution by a working alternative. As Mr. Langdon-Davies wittily suggests about the fertilizing tactics of a certain orchid, any Deity who inspired them must be conceived of as a cheery person with a French sense of humour.

The fact is that the Victorians, conscious of having made some useful discoveries, had jumped to the very human conclusion that they had com-



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passed in a few simple formulæ all that was worth knowing about the broad outlines of the Universe, and that it only remained for those who came after them to fill in the details. Whereas the real situation was just the reverse, for fresh light had undoubtedly been thrown on a myriad details, whereas the broad principles remained as mysterious as ever, or rather, more mysterious than ever, as fresh complications came to light in the course of universal progress, and fresh contradictions were suggested in every theory that could be framed to account for it.

The very conception of evolution, instead of stimulating the pride of intellect, as it had done with the Victorians, was, if its implications were thought out, calculated to have an exactly reverse effect, since the mind itself was a product of evolution, and had developed in rough and ready response to the prosaic requirements of animal nature.

Simple Simon went a fishing  
For to catch a whale,  
All the water he had got  
Was in his mother's pail,

but even Simon did not imagine that he could explain the Universe, when all the mind he had got was that bequeathed him by Mother Monkey and Granny Mud !

It may well be asked, at this point, what precise relevance these fluctuations of scientific opinion have to the course of history. What has the Great War got to do with anyone's opinion about an electric eel ? or how is the question of a chicken getting out of an egg connected with that of civilization getting out of an unprecedented mess ? The answer—or at any rate one answer—is that the religious factor is of decisive historical importance and that what passes for science is often religious over-belief masking in scientific garb. This is inevitably the case when there is talk of conflict between science and religion, because in order for such a conflict to become conceivable,

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science must quit her true and impersonal rôle, and come down into the arena—not without dust and heat—as a rival religion.

It was not enough for the biologist Darwin to have revolutionized biology. Evolution had got to be a gospel, and Darwin—who had never dreamed of anything so ridiculous—its prophet, perhaps even a saviour. As evolution was but an inclusive word for everything that had ever happened, it could naturally be used to justify any future development that the user desired to see. Capitalists and communists, militarists and non-resisters, believers and atheists, all claimed evolutionary sanction with precisely equal justification. If this had been all, evolution would have been no more than a luxurious emphatic, like either of the two adjectives attached by the private soldier to nearly every noun he uses. But it was something more, for the authority of Darwin was freely lent, by his disciples, to the two following propositions :

(1) Blind chance is a sufficient explanation for everything that has ever happened. There is no purpose in, or behind, evolution. God, if He exists, is unknowable—though how anything whatever, even possible existence, can be asserted of the Unknowable, is not very clear.

(2) Far from it being true that love makes the world go round, it is a ruthless struggle for survival that has caused mud to become Man, and therefore <sup>1</sup> will cause Man to become Superman. It follows that war and national egoism, with its accompaniment of race hatred and prejudice, are good things in themselves, and that anybody who tries to remedy them is a rebel against science, an obscurantist heretic. It is curious that that last of the great Rationalist die-hards, Sir Arthur Keith, has lent his authority, as a Man of Science, to this terrific *credo*.

<sup>1</sup> A consequence flatly denied by Huxley.

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When the name of Science is more feared than that of God, the effect of such teachings in driving the world to suicide must be considerable, and it is of no small danger to mankind when specialists transgress the limits of their subject, and forsaking the indicative for the imperative mood, seek to order the affairs of men and nations by pseudo-scientific analogy.

By the early part of the twentieth century, the sweeping theories about evolution dear to the Victorians had gone out of fashion, and progress in biology had acquired the advantage of possessing no very obvious publicity value. It was plain that the Darwinian hypothesis in its original form was no longer adequate, though whether it could be reconstructed to accommodate the new facts, or whether chance would have to be abandoned, and design or purpose reintroduced as a final explanation, was still keenly controverted. But few echoes of such controversies penetrated to the market-place.

Biology was the science of life in its physical aspect, which may partly account for the materialistic bias of its leading exponents. But Man has a mind, and perhaps a spirit to be considered. People were accustomed to speak of Science as their fathers had spoken of God, as if it were by its very nature so beneficent and infallible as to be entirely above criticism. That might be well enough, in the sense that you can never have too much knowledge. But Science, at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, had developed so irregularly as to constitute a dangerously lopsided mass of information. In all that concerned the knowledge and control of lifeless matter, it had advanced with giant strides during the last two centuries. As far as the body and its functioning were concerned, its progress, for the last half century, had been no less sensational. But mind and spirit—how far had Science advanced Man's knowledge of them? It was a simple case of demand

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and supply. There had been an unprecedented demand for knowledge about things, but hardly any at all for light on the Inner Man. Such new light as was thrown on that had come from novelists and poets—the men and women of creative intuition. It was not the clear dry light of Science, and the resultant knowledge was not organized or cumulative, like that of the physicists, the chemists, and the biologists.

It is true that there had been much written in the nineteenth century about psychology, and a still younger science founded by the Positivist, Auguste Comte, and christened by Herbert Spencer Sociology. It was a Victorian delusion, that persisted into the Twentieth Century, that if you could only give a thing a long name, preferably ending in "ology," you had found out all that was worth knowing about it. As a science, sociology never got properly on to its feet at all, and merely became a word under which were lumped together a heterogeneous mass of speculation and research, preferably about the customs of savages, it being a sort of accepted convention that the nearer you got to the primitive, the more you were concerned with sociology. Your sociologist was intensely interested in Veddahs and Fugeians, not much concerned about Greeks<sup>1</sup>—except when he contrived to regard them in the light of slightly sophisticated savages—and mercifully refrained, as a rule, from peeping and sociologizing on the graves of Florentines, Elizabethans, Sans-culottes and other inhabitants of the historian's province. This is not to say that an immense amount of valuable research was not accomplished that could be conveniently grouped, by *The Times Literary Supplement*, under the Sociology heading, but such research would have been as well—and perhaps better—done if the long word had never been invented. But to talk of

<sup>1</sup> A preference that may perhaps be not unconnected with the difficulty of acquiring a classical education.

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a science of sociology was the fallacy of inventing a word and then assuming that there must be some reality to justify it.

Science, then, had so far little or no light to throw upon Man in the mass. Its pretensions were somewhat greater to deal with man as an individual. There were bulky and elaborate treatises on psychology, and even a certain amount of experiment, with so far trivial results. But psychology, as taught in the universities, was a science still in the pre-Baconian stage of being hopelessly entangled with metaphysics, and overshadowed by the authority of famous wise men, from Democritus and Aristotle to Hegel and Hamilton, whose opinions were appealed to and discussed in every treatise on the subject. The result was that a treatise on psychology usually took the form of a prolonged word-spinning exercise in a jargon specially devised for the purpose.

If you turn up *Psychology* in the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, you will find a perfect specimen of this kind of writing. To select one typical passage at random :

“Into the man’s head the whole world goes including the head itself. Such thoroughgoing ‘introjection’ affords no ground for subsequent ‘projection.’ Thus the endeavour to explain sensation overreaches itself : the external object or thing that was supposed to cause sensations and to be therefore distinct from them, was in the end wholly resolved into these and regarded as built out of them by sensation (Mill) or by apperceptive synthesis (Kant). But no ‘mental chemistry,’ no initial alchemy of ‘forms’ can generate objective reality from feelings or sense-impressions as psychophysically defined.”

Or if you want something a little more definite, take the following diagrammatic analysis of love and hate, by a Scottish psychologist of world-wide reputation :

“Let A be the object of a sentiment of hate, and B be the object of a sentiment of love ; and let  $\alpha$  in our diagram stand for the complex neural disposition whose excitement underlies

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the idea or presentation of A, and let  $\beta$  be the corresponding disposition concerned in the presentation of B. Then we must suppose that  $\alpha$  becomes intimately connected with R, F and P, the central nuclei of the instincts of repulsion, fear and pugnacity, and less intimately with C and S, those of curiosity and submission, and not at all with T, the central nucleus of the tender or paternal instinct "

—after all which we are prepared for the supreme truth that if " the reproductive instinct could be abolished in any people, that people would soon disappear from the face of the earth."

And this is not some wild attempt to go one better than *Alice in Wonderland*, but occurs in a grave and authoritative treatise on Social Psychology, in which nobody, even south of the Tweed, could see anything at all funny during these opening years of the twentieth century.

There was certainly promise of better things in the work of the American psychologist, William James, who, as early as 1891, had published his great treatise linking up the science of the mind with that of the body and clearing away not a few metaphysical cobwebs. But the extracts already quoted show how little his influence had availed to get psychology out of its age-long ruts, and convert it into a living and progressive science, capable of being mentioned in the same breath with modern chemistry or biology.

This is a fact whose importance will be best appreciated by those who believe that the crying need of the time was for a mental and spiritual revolution corresponding to the revolution brought about by machinery in Man's environment. Science, that had helped Man towards the knowledge and conquest of things, had hardly begun to help him towards the knowledge and conquest of himself. The sciences advanced not in line, but *en echelon*, and while the sciences of things were forging ahead, going on from strength to strength, psychology had hardly moved off from the starting-point.

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The call of the Sphinx Environment to every living creature was "Adapt yourself or die." Science was hard at work, transforming Man's environment, and setting him ever more exacting problems of adaptation, but she was not at work transforming Man, for the sufficient reason that Man had never asked her to do so. And the proverb held—They who don't ask, don't get.

In the all-important science of adult education or mind-training there had not only been no advance but actual retrogression since the Middle Ages. For then the inner man had been held of greater importance than his environment, and the Church had applied all her skill and science to taming the raw barbarian nature, and making savages into Christians. The rules of her monastic orders rank among the most elaborately-thought-out systems of mind-training ever devised, and the great centralized organization by which she sought to mould the minds of all who came beneath her influence was successful at least to the extent of planting firm and deep the foundations of Western civilization. But now the function of the religious bodies as mind-training agencies was almost in abeyance, even if they had been capable of adapting systems that had served well enough for primitive requirements to the far more exacting conditions of the modern age.

And the pathetic phenomenon was witnessed, of a blind and groping urge for the light finding no sage nor priest to guide it, but being exploited for commercial purposes by pushing business men. On both sides of the Atlantic there were many people who felt that if they could only find some way of making themselves more efficient human machines, they would, in an age of ferocious competition, be able to command more of the good things of life. The scientists, who knew so well how to calculate the strains of a bridge or the distance of a star, had

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apparently no particular information to impart on this subject. From the textbooks on psychology there was nothing to be got more definite than a headache.

But here stepped in the man of business : " You want a trained mind. And behold, I can deliver the goods ! Submit yourself to me in blind faith ; pledge yourself solemnly to secrecy ; drop a few guineas (the number will be revealed on application) into the slot ; and you shall be something more than wise, you shall be rich—your income will be doubled, trebled, quadrupled, like that of this clergyman in Rochdale or that chartered accountant at Watford." And thus what in the open market would have been one or two shilling's worth of printed matter would be purchased by the faithful for more than that number of pounds, and they would be privileged to conduct a secret correspondence with priests of the mystery, whose salaries might, if revealed, turn out to exceed the wildest dreams of avarice, or else, as Mr. Belloc might say,

" they would not—  
I cannot be positive which."

It was, of course, a revival of the old mystery cults, with all the romance and spiritual fervour extracted, and run with a sole eye to creating and exploiting a demand. No doubt a good many of the clients did improve their minds to some extent by the mere fact of being stimulated to obtain their money's worth. In this the secret mind-trainer had the advantage over the tipster, whose clients could not, within the limits of the law, do anything to secure the victory of the fancies handed out to them. But the mere fact of the systems being secret, and withdrawn from public criticism, must have created an almost irresistible temptation to substitute mental stunts for sound, but less sensational, methods.

These systems, more numerous in America than



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in England, would not be worth a passing mention, were it not for the fact that their virtual monopoly of mind-training implied something like the bankruptcy of twentieth-century science on the mental side. There were no doubt patent medicines for the body as well as the mind, but for the body alone there were also qualified doctors, and a healing art whose technique nobody dreamed of shrouding in mystery.

It was not a question, as ardent controversialists imagined, of whether Science, in the abstract, was or was not a good thing. The science of any given time is no abstract conception, but represents a definite sum of knowledge and achievement. He is not her enemy who maintains that a lopsided or unevenly developed science may be no blessing, but a deadly menace.

The fact that Man had conquered external Nature without any serious attempt to comprehend or conquer human nature, meant that he had armed himself not only with the power of destroying his civilization, but with the effective though blind will to put that power to the proof.

### CHAPTER III

#### PSYCHOLOGY THROUGH FICTION

As long ago as 1832 the term psychological had been applied by the still youthful Disraeli to one of his novels, *Contarini Fleming*. All through the nineteenth century, men of letters, and particularly of fiction, had been pushing their researches deeper and deeper into the obscure places of the soul. Style itself had needed to be refined and twisted, sometimes out of intelligibility, in order to express accurately the subtlest nuances of character. Browning had led the way with his monologues and literary dramas. George Meredith had followed with a style that sacrificed all pretence of realism, and served as a means for putting on to paper things that had hitherto defied expression. Meredith's characters lived in a world in which everybody was perpetually scintillating Meredithian, and in which nobody was capable of dropping for a sentence into the obvious. For those whose brains were capable of functioning on these levels, it was a fascinating world to inhabit, and none the less so from being like nothing on this platitudinous earth.

An even more elaborate psychological technique was developed by that Anglophile American, Henry James, and at the beginning of the century was approaching its extreme pitch of refinement. James had none of Meredith's rank almost Rabelaisian vitality. Oscar Wilde had talked of existing beautifully. The people in Henry James's world—and most of all in that of his later novels—were freed from the necessity or desire for any occupation more

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strenuous than that of existing subtly, distinguishing and dissecting and refining upon moods, or splitting moral hairs invisible to the workaday human.

The Belgian dramatist-philosopher, Maeterlinck, had succeeded in improving even upon this technique, by conjuring up a world deliberately emptied of reality, investing characters and places with names evocative of no one country or period, but suggesting phantoms of the subconsciousness, into which some dim and fugitive life has been breathed. It was a drama of pure thought, or rather, of what lies at the back of thought. But unlike James, Maeterlinck was destined to tend towards an increasing realism with advancing years.

Meredith, the later James, and the earlier Maeterlinck, had this in common, that they had resort to an artificial world created to serve as a field for psychological expression. But another school was coming to the fore which aimed at combining penetration of character with minutest fidelity to the bare facts of life. Thomas Hardy had showed the way in his Wessex novels, which are not only profound studies of the human soul in conflict with destiny, but also serve as a unique historic memorial of the Wessex countryside. There were other influences at work. The Russian novel, and especially those of Tolstoi, had showed how it was possible to create an illusion of reality by childlike fidelity of description, and at the same time to strip the soul bare. And the French realists, headed by Zola, had resorted to so indiscriminating an accumulation of objective detail as to cause Nietzsche to sum up Zola in the simple phrase—or, in German, the simple word—"delight to stink." And yet who, like Zola, has performed the admittedly unsavoury process of uncovering whatever soul may appertain to the French peasant? Who, like him, has stripped the pomp, pride and circumstance from modern war and revealed that abomination in all its

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unspeakable foulness, and yet with a restraint and scientific austerity that make even a Remarque and a Sheriff seem journalists by comparison? After all, it is not usually charged against sanitary inspectors that they evince any particular delight in the perfumes they disclose.

Literature in the new century was evincing a marked disposition to enter into wedlock with Science. In the nineties, Mr. Kipling had amazed everybody by the uncanny exactitude of his acquaintance with machinery. He would sing as melodiously of crank shafts and dynamos, as former bards of bosoms and roses. Mr. Kipling's interest in machinery was, in fact, precisely of that kind. He was the last of the great Victorian romantics. Romance came up to him even with the 9.15. To a genuine modern, it is more probable that the 9.15 would have brought up unhygienic overcrowding in out-of-date coaches, clouds of filthy coal smoke, and perhaps the thought of a capitalist society puffing and clanking to its doom.

More in the true modern spirit was Mr. H. G. Wells. As Spinoza had been god-drunken, so of Mr. Wells it may be said that he was science-drunken. He had, significantly enough, served his apprenticeship in biology, and throughout his life retained the biologist's characteristic abhorrence of anything savouring of the mystic or supernatural. He approached his long consideration of life from the angle of the nineteenth-century Rationalist. But he had also some of the delighted curiosity of a child turned loose in a shop of mechanical toys. He had that confident, morning sense of up-to-dateness that only one who has lived in the *fin de siècle* can recapture, even in memory. Science was making all things new; there was no limit to her possibilities. Mr. Wells's imagination was early at work, with a furious intensity, giving these possibilities concrete and visible form. Queen Victoria's subjects should understand what

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try was not unnaturally furious with indignation at what was regarded as a cowardly murder, and a cry went up for vengeance. For the moment it seemed as if an Anglo-Russian war, with all its immeasurable potentialities of disaster, was about to break out—Lord Charles Beresford, standing across the Russian path with the Channel Fleet, made no secret of his eagerness to send the whole lot to Davy Jones. But there were cooler heads at Whitehall, and the Tsar, who had no stomach for war with a new adversary, did the gentlemanly thing, promised such reparation as was in his power, and consented to the conduct of his officers being submitted to a Court of Arbitration, whereupon he was permitted to forward these unhappy victims of his orders to the certain doom that awaited them at the hands of Admiral Togo.

But though the Tsar had spoken smooth things, black hatred was in his heart. How indeed could the man who had cheerfully gone on with his coronation pageantry and junketings after some thousands of his subjects had been trampled to death under his eyes, be expected to sympathize with all this fuss about a few wretched fishermen? Quite obviously it was a supreme exhibition of British cant and enmity to Russia. No words were too bad for "the mangy enemy," as Nicholas was pleased to characterize his future allies.

Further troubles were in store for the Tsar. Not only was the war going from bad to worse, but the home front was collapsing. A crowd of impoverished working people came to seek redress of their grievances from their Little Father, who slipped off out of harm's way, and left the most brutal of his uncles to shoot down a thousand or so of them as they stood unarmed in front of his Palace. Then, one afternoon, as His Majesty was playing tennis, his game was interrupted for a moment by a telegram announcing

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But in the series of novels in which Mr. Wells first began to bring the Future back to the Present, there was a very different tale to tell. Science, to Mr. Wells, was no beneficent fairy, but a djinn of unlimited power, which, if he were not controlled, would be capable of destroying those who had been rash enough to call him up, and laying waste their whole world. Mr. Wells's first visions of conquering science were prospects of sheer horror.

He started by a book in which he anticipated, by a generation, the view of time, as a fourth dimension, that was destined to receive scientific confirmation in the discoveries of Einstein. He allowed his hero, and therefore his reader, to rob Death of his sting by travelling backwards and forwards at will through the future. He starts off by time-hogging through some few milleniums, and has a dim vision *en route* of vast and magnificent buildings—symbolic of the triumph of Science. And then at last he stops, to find—what? An upper world peopled by pretty, half-witted dwarfs, and an underworld in which the machines are still at work, tended by stunted monsters, unable to bear the light, who come up at night to catch and eat those others. And then at the next stop, even this remnant of humanity is long extinct, and gigantic crabs sidle heavily about in a world without any future but—and we have one desolating glimpse of it—a dying sun and softly falling snow, and some last living thing flopping aimlessly up and down on a frozen sandbank.

In a subsequent book, *When the Sleeper Wakes*, and in one of his *Tales of Space and Time*, Mr. Wells allows us to stop only some two centuries ahead, and to see the triumph of Science at its culminating-point. Here we have roofed and towering cities, with the descendants of the capitalist class leading a life of parasitic luxury up above, while far below, shut out from the light of day, and without even the means

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of easy suicide, the workers tend the machines in conditions of unspeakable misery.

Science is no more beneficent when she enables a ghastly Doctor, in one of Mr. Wells's other early novels, to transform beasts into even more bestial humans, when she endows a man with the gift of invisibility, to his own bodily and spiritual destruction, or when she furnishes a race of ruthless intelligent cuttle-fish from Mars, with the means of wiping out all mankind except those who are reserved to have the blood sucked from their living bodies.

Such was the attitude of Mr. Wells to Science at the opening of the new century. And it was his constant preoccupation throughout his subsequent career to save mankind from the fate of the mechanic who is caught up and crushed in his own machinery. How could Progress be directed scientifically towards Utopia? Mr. Wells was temperamentally incapable of joining Tolstoi and Edward Carpenter in turning his back upon Science, as upon an accursed thing, and seeking to revert to primitive conditions. He must need be a worshipper at her shrine, even if she should prove a goddess of destruction. And so he addressed himself repeatedly to the problem—whether or not we are to credit him with a plausible solution—of devising a social order calculated to make Science not a curse, but a blessing to mankind. Moreover, his increasing preoccupation with educational problems shows that he at least recognized the necessity of training up men capable, intellectually and morally, of running a scientific world.

Mr. Wells's didactic suggestions for reforming human nature are perhaps the most unconvincing part of his work. He toys with the idea of creating what we should now call an order of Fascists—at the time of the Japanese victory they are of course Samurai—but to the profane mind the scheme appears to be one for intensive cultivation of prigs. He has

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much to say about public libraries, guilds of literature, examinations, courses, and all the generally accepted means of standardizing personality on the most approved middle-class lines. In fact we never feel quite sure whether Mr. Wells is not, at heart, more desirous of suppressing than of developing the individual, of turning men into efficient team workers, nicely subordinated cells in the tissues of the social body.

Whatever liberties Mr. Wells might desire to take with other people's individuality, nothing could rob him of his own. He might preach standardization, but he was the last man to put it into practice. He brought a scientific curiosity and method to the study of personality that make his novels, at their best, documents of the utmost psychological significance. Like Mr. Bernard Shaw on the stage, so he, in the novel, had the faculty of regarding individuals in their relation to the social order, and in the most inspired, at any rate, of his creations, without sacrifice of individuality. With Mr. Wells, the theorist, we are never very far from the Bolshevik championship of the State against the soul; but in some at least of the novels we feel the beauty of the Greek ideal, that the individual can only rise to the full stature of his personality as a member of the community.

Another novelist of the scientific school was Arnold Bennett. Greater than Mr. Wells as a technician of his craft, he was far less in the scope of his vision and the height of his ambition. But in one sense he was even more of a psychologist. For he applied scientific method, with the utmost intensity of concentration, to the shaping of his own career. The most successful of Arnold Bennett's creations was the clerk in a solicitor's office, who determined to achieve material success by the simple process of driving a pen, and did so with the punctual efficiency of a well-constructed machine, with fame and a chance of im-



mortality as by-products. He had no time for the frills and thrills of the ordinary best-seller. He would write of what he knew best by experience, would fearlessly set himself to describe Philistine lives in the drabbest and dingiest of industrial hives. And by sheer, concentrated honesty of description he succeeded in building up in the reader's mind the consciousness that these people, even these, had souls, and that beneath the smoky canopy of the Five Towns were fires of passion and threads of tragedy for those who had eyes to see. Arnold Bennett had none of the Victorian decency that averts its eyes from the unpleasing things of life; he had all the scientist's austere determination to get to grips with the facts, whatever they might be. And perhaps for that very reason, he succeeds in convincing us that God's image, however befouled and battered, never quite loses the stamp of its original.

Another literary psychologist was the Polish seaman, Conrad, one of the two writers of this time—Rabindranath Tagore being the other—who accomplished the miracle of writing lovely and sensitive prose in what, for them, was an alien tongue. Conrad was more of a conscious artist than Bennett—too fastidiously conscious was the opinion of some who found themselves bewildered by the manifold and indirect approaches that he sometimes elected to make to his main narrative. But he had the same intense concentration on the subtleties of character, the same determination to probe and dissect till he had laid the very soul bare for inspection. And like Bennett—only to an even greater extent, since Bennett had other areas to explore than that of the Staffordshire Potteries—Conrad followed the modern scientific tendency towards specialization. He wrote almost exclusively of the sea, and of the merchant service to which he had belonged. Other authors, in plenty, had written books of adventure on the same theme.

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But Conrad's books, like Herman Melville's, were all but unique in nautical literature, in focusing the main interest upon adventures of the spirit.

The scientific study of the mind was thus being pursued with decidedly more fruitful results by the intellectual pick of the novelists than by the scientists themselves. But these results could not, by the nature of the case, form part of an accepted and growing body of scientific truth. It was only by suggesting fresh points of view that the creator of fiction could be of help to the psychologist. But there is always hope that where intuition has blazed the trail, Science will sooner or later drive the road.

Even so, no perceptible approach had been even suggested to the task of adapting human nature to the requirements of a new age, unless we are to count the various commercial mystery cults advertised as mind-training. And though "Adapt or die" had, for countless millions of years, been the law of life, nobody dreamed of breaking out into the Pilgrim's lamentable cry of "What shall I do to be saved?" For who, in those piping times, would have thought of Western civilization as of a vast City of Destruction?

## CHAPTER IV

### THE JOURNALIZATION OF THOUGHT

The Edwardian Era, with its pendant of the pre-War years of George V's reign, is a time of which it is peculiarly difficult to capture any unified impression. In spite of the immensely longer length of the Queen's reign, it seems easier to understand what is meant by the Victorian than the Edwardian standpoint. This is no doubt because the Victorians were more conscious of having something definite to stand upon. One can say that Tennyson and Kingsley, Ruskin and Matthew Arnold, had a Victorian sameness beneath all their differences, and that the sameness was fundamental. Would it be possible to make the same remark about Mr. Wells and Mr. Masfield and Rupert Brooke? No doubt a case might be put even for this, but it would not be nearly such an obvious case. It would not be wholly paradoxical to say that the Edwardians were most alike in being all different.

"I suppose," a Conservative member had said during the Bradlaugh controversy, "we all have a God of some kind"—but it would have taken an incredibly complacent Backwoodsman to have ventured on such a remark in the nineteen-hundreds. It was not only a question of God, but of any sort of fixed belief. Opinion, at least among the intelligentsia, was in a state of unprecedented flux. A society of Cambridge men, desirous of being perfectly abreast of the times, displayed something like genius in taking to themselves the title of Heretics; this would have been as incredible a pose, in an earlier

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age, as if now these same young men had called themselves the Cowards, the Cads, or the Dirties. It did not in the least matter whether or not you were right, provided everybody else thought you wrong. But heresy was not long in becoming a super-orthodoxy more tyrannous than orthodoxy itself. There was an unbending convention of conventions to be defied, an idolatry of prescribed iconoclasm. Under this new tyranny the old freedom drooped and died. No freethinker would have dared assert his freedom to subscribe to the Creed, let alone the Articles. And though in the Victorian heyday there had never failed to be individualists capable of pulling a hair out of Tennyson's beard, one would have liked to hear the up-to-date Edwardian who would have dared rise up and eulogize him.

The drivell and belch and stink of Tennyson.

Such was the typically up-to-date line of the typically up-to-date bard, and it was in vain for Mr. Watson, who must have felt a kind of vested interest in the Tennysonian tradition, to vociferate,

Here was a bard shall outlive you all.

The up-to-date needed its little time to drivell and belch and stink itself out of date before the truth of the words could be appreciated.

The Edwardians, if they were incapable of making up their minds what to believe, could at least attain a considerable measure of agreement on what not to believe. It is not without its significance that some of the most memorable work of the time was accomplished in the field of satire; Mr. Chesterton's lines to F. E. Smith will bear comparison with the best of Pope and Dryden for their annihilating finality. Mr. Belloc's *Emmanuel Burden* is more informative about the politics and finance of the time than any orthodox history; Mr. E. V. Lucas's laughter about Trans-

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atlantic methods of boosting the "Insidecompleteuar Britanniaaware" only needed the tang of malice to make it equally memorable, while, in spite of the unaccountable oblivion into which they have fallen, Sir Mark Sykes's skits on the Drill Book and the monthly magazines are among the most devastating things in modern literature.

It was a *cliché* of the time that it was one of transition. But this rather implied that there was somewhere to go to, whereas all that was really certain was that the old order of things had been left definitely behind. In a surprisingly short time after the old Queen's death, the reaction against everything Victorian had completely triumphed. The great Victorian figures had become symbols of an orthodoxy that was anathema. They had not yet developed into the row of gigantic Aunt Sallies at whom every hack in Grub Street could have a remunerative shy—that was only destined to come about after Lytton Strachey's unerring hand had launched the first four cudgels. The Edwardians had not yet quite discovered the secret of getting at their predecessors, except by the thrusting out of an occasional tongue. It was more a question of ignoring than of dethroning them. Tennyson and Ruskin, Gladstone and Arnold, quietly faded out of fashion, like the frock-coat—that they could ever be pilloried as humbugs stood not yet within the prospect of belief. One great Victorian whose popularity remained proof against all vicissitudes was Dickens, and we might perhaps add Disraeli.

In what did the men of this time believe, and what dream of the future did they hope to realize? Of most of them it might be said that they no longer believed in anything very definite, and that they were content to chance the future. Things were all right for the moment, and he who looked beyond the moment was a fool, asking for trouble. Nay, more,

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he was a public nuisance, who went about jarring nerves that were already on edge. No one, surely, who remembers that time, can have forgotten, unless he is abnormally insensitive, the apprehension, never very far below the threshold, of some approaching peril—it might be German, it might be Red or even Yellow, but in any case destined to break the continuity of the safe and prosperous life of those who could afford to live it. That is what lends its enduring quality to Sir Edward Elgar's symphony commemorating the death of Edward VII, and thunder-charged with an apprehension not yet to be named. An alternative title might well be, "Second Thoughts on Hope and Glory." In a world where nothing was sacred, nothing certain—could anything be safe? It was a gay age, but with something of the hectic gaiety that one can imagine in the latter stages of Belshazzar's Feast.

And yet the last thing that the Edwardians aspired to do was to take calm stock of the situation and its perils, with a view to setting their house in order while there was yet time. That would have entailed an amount of concentrated thought and effort quite alien to the spirit of the time. Their instinct was to leave the morrow to take thought for the things of itself, and fling themselves into the moment with a zest that became agonizing in its endeavour to extract the last drop of life's honey while the flower yet bloomed.

I have already ventured to compare the edifice of Victorian civilization to Beckford's "Abbey" mansion at Fonthill, with its vast proportions and decorative prodigality—but without foundations. One might go on to liken the Edwardian civilization to that architecture of exhibition and pleasure palaces that formed so prominent a feature of the time, an architecture that did not even pretend to foundations nor aspire to permanence, but aimed, by means of

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stucco and gilding and coloured lights, at giving the jaded office worker and servant-girl their shillings-worth of illusion, by transporting them, for one brief evening, to something that might pass for fairyland, with its court of honour, its Alpine scenery, and magic stairs that moved by themselves, all spick and span and up-to-date.

Nothing in that age, not even civilization itself, was made to last. God, the God whom it was no longer fashionable to take seriously, had at least stood for permanence. The Victorian morality, with its fictions and taboos, had aimed at imparting a lasting quality to human relationships. Victorian genius had taken itself seriously—the very mahogany was solid. But now a generation was coming to maturity whose minds had been nourished on the tit-bits and stunts of the new journalism. And the journalese habit of relying on repeated and disconnected stimuli had, in an astonishingly short time, come to prevail. It was a time for sensation and not for reflection.

No longer was it safe even for genius to take itself or its mission seriously, greatness was coming to be regarded as a Victorian fashion that had gone out, and was only to be tolerated in recognized survivals, such as Thomas Hardy.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Wells was never more representative of his time than when he set himself to war against the bare notion that such a thing as a great man had ever existed, or ever could exist. To war on greatness was, in fact, necessary for Mr. Wells's ideal of de-individualizing mankind, that the community might be all in all. It was not till after the War that he gave himself the pleasure of knocking Alexander, Cæsar, Napoleon, and the other great historical figures, into so many paper cocked-hats.

<sup>1</sup> The appearance of *The Dynasts*, whose boasting by the *cognoscenti* showed about as much sense of critical proportion as the denigration of *Tess*, may be said to mark Hardy's reception into the Order of Panjandrum.

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But in his fantasia, *Boon*, published shortly after the War had broken out, he trounced the whole conception of greatness in a manner that at least entitles him to rank among the great satirists of a period of great satire.

Mr. Wells was not by any means the only Tarquin who delighted in flicking off the heads of all the tallest poppies. It was not altogether by accident that Samuel Butler, the self-styled *enfant terrible* of literature, only came posthumously into his own in the new century. Mr. Bernard Shaw, who was perhaps more influenced by Butler than any other author, not only preached, but practised irreverence, his favourite target of all being Shakespeare, whose worship he stigmatized as bardolatry, though his objection did not appear to rest on a much more tangible basis than the Athenian voter's dislike of always hearing Aristides called "The Just." Still it was excellent advertisement, if not very convincing argument, to chalk up casual Billingsgate on the tombs of the bard's contemporaries—to call Webster a fool and a cut-throat, Fletcher a penny-a-liner, Chapman a blathering and Jonson a brutish pedant. The significant part of such scintillations is that while in an earlier age they would have been enough to damn Mr. Shaw's reputation in spite of his genius, it is probable that among Mr. Shaw's contemporaries they did more even than his genius to enhance it. This sort of thing was so naughty, so modern, so quite, in fact, too thrilling for words.

Another and rather more subtle form of iconoclasm, only destined to reach its full development with the post-War mass-production of biography, was called humanization. To humanize a celebrity was to reduce him to the lowest human denominator. This art was still in a comparatively primitive stage, for no one, before the War, would have dared invent a dipsomaniac Gordon or a goatish Gladstone, but



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it was coming to be pretty extensively practised, if only because it requires less concentration to listen to the sort of tale that any valet can spin about his master's foibles, than to rise to an understanding of that element in a great man's personality and achievement that constitutes his greatness. And concentration, in an age dominated by journalism, is the thing of all others to be avoided by the ordinary reader.

The masterpiece of humanization, in the pre-Strachey era, was constituted by Frank Harris's attempt to introduce his contemporaries to "the Man, Shakespeare"—it is to be noted that in the terminology of humanization the dethroned genius is always "The Man." Harris was an adventurer to whose career—at least as reported by himself—the stock journalese epithet, "amazing," was strictly applicable. As Oscar Wilde said of him, "Frank Harris has been received in all the great houses—*once*." He was one of those meaty, full-blooded individuals with heavy moustaches who flourished with peculiar rankness about the end of the last century. He was troubled—he never made any secret about it—by an inordinate development of his carnal affections. He saw everything coloured and distorted through glasses of sex. And by cogitation on the plays, he compiled to his own satisfaction the biography of a highly sexualized and all too human Shakespeare. The only person about whom such a portrait could be in the least degree informative was Harris himself. As with Mr. Shaw's criticisms of the Elizabethans, the real significance of Harris's Shakespeare lay in the gladness with which it was received. An extract from one typical review will suffice as a sample—"Thus is Shakespeare brought to earth." That was the spirit of the worthy Jacobins who had proposed to destroy the Cathedral of Chartres, "because it dominates too much the republican town." Mr. Everyman rejoiced greatly to see Shakespeare

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brought down to his own level ; it was in nobody's interest to discover that the fallen idol was Harris himself, in a suit of trunk hose hired from Clarkson's.

It would not have been so bad if the levelling business had stopped short at reputations. Strafing Shakespeare after all benefited the iconoclast more than it hurt the Bard. But it was a different matter when thought itself was reduced to the least common denominator by undergoing a process of journalization in order to make it palatable to the mob. It must be observed that the intellectual leaders of the age were now beginning to be sharply divided off into two definite classes—academic and popular. There were the pure specialists, who held academic or official posts and who devoted their energies to claims staked out in the field of some particular science, claims that tended to become ever more restricted as the sum of accumulated knowledge increased. These specialists wrote in a jargon of their own to an audience of fellow-specialists ; they had honour among their peers and did not aspire to be appreciated by the ordinary layman. The race of the great scientists of letters, the Huxleys, the Tyndalls, the Cliffords, was almost extinct at the beginning of the century. Even history, under the auspices of Lord Acton, Professor Bury, and the compilers of *The Cambridge Modern History*, was ceasing to be the province of man of letters, and—officially at any rate—was being turned over to teams of academic specialists.

This was all to the good, in so far as it preserved the peace that ought to reign in the realms of Science, and kept her devotees from the temptation of tout-ing for applause in the market-place, but the isolation of science from culture, and of scientists themselves in closed compartments of specialism, was not without its dangers. In the human sciences especially, as well as in the philosophy that ought to be the crown

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of all science, it might easily come to pass that the experts would form a caste completely out of touch with living reality, all talking the same jargon and in a tacit conspiracy to allow its verbal counters to pass current for reality. We have seen to what an output of wastepaper coinage this might lead in the realm of psychology. Again, the restriction of vision to the intensive study of one limited field might easily tend to a sort of academic provincialism, because the part can only be understood in its relation to the whole, and he who never takes his eyes off one object does not see even that clearly or in proportion. There is no tyranny to compare, for sheer wrong-headedness, with that of the expert.

The withdrawal of the specialist from contact with the educated public created a demand for enlightenment from some more accessible source. It was not likely that the ordinary man, and still less that the ordinary woman, with any pretensions to culture, would forgo the right to think and be informed about the scientific progress that was making all things new and, as they firmly believed, better and better. There must be a culture of the market-place as well as a jargon of the schools. There must be guides and philosophers who would talk in a language understood of the people and who would adapt not only their language but their methods of thought to the journalese standards of the market-place.

To this necessity even genius had to bow, if it wished for a hearing. It was a bitterly true saying of Mr. Bernard Shaw's that the sceptic who is cautiously feeling his way towards the next century has no chance unless he happens to have the specific talent of the mountebank as well, in which case it is as a mountebank that he catches votes. Not only in commerce, but in life and thought, it was a time of quick returns. Even the philosopher—unless he liked to turn his back on the world and talk academic

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shop about resurrecting Hegel or defining the Absolute—was expected to score his points quickly and pungently, and to be judged, as at an election meeting, by the laughter or applause of an audience that could not be bothered to reflect.

It was putting too great a strain, even on genius, to subject it to such a yoke. It is at least to some extent true that the public gets the authors it deserves. For between author and public there is a continual interchange of stimulus ; they are, in a sense, partners. And if the public is incapable of playing up to its author, the author will sooner or later start playing down to his public. He will score as he is expected to score, and not waste his time on unappreciated subtleties, nor strain his mind's eye with gazing into depths into which nobody but himself can spare so much as a glance.

This was the more to be regretted because, in these early days of the century, the leaders of popular thought, whom the market-place at least had enough discrimination to honour, were men whose genius would have adorned any period in history. It was the heyday of that great triumvirate, Messrs. Shaw, Wells, and Chesterton, each of whom—as far as any such prediction is possible about contemporaries—has accomplished work whose enduring quality is proof against any conceivable revaluation. All three possessed, in overflowing measure, that quality of vital energy that is almost essential to genius, and each displayed it in an obviously unaffected delight in horseplay, or sheer, extravagant nonsense. However much any of us may presume to criticize or dissent from their writings, it is hardly possible to peruse a page—with the exception of obvious journalistic pot-boiling—without the sense of contact with a supernormally fertile and suggestive mind. Say what you will, here is God's plenty.

But from so large a debt of gratitude, a certain

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deduction must be made, in view of what can only be described as the debasing of the coinage of thought by the alloy of journalism. It was no doubt a case of necessity—the public got the metal for which it clamoured—but, as the present generation is not unlikely to discover, the effects of debasing coinage are not in the least degree affected by the straits or intentions of the debaser. The important point is that the Triumvirate, assisted by scores of lesser writers, was extending to the higher regions of thought the process that Harmsworth, Newnes, and their like had begun in the lower. Just as the pundits of the nursery professed to teach reading without tears, so those of the market-place had somehow to find, on pain of losing their audience, a way of sweetening thought by cutting out the necessity for concentration.

It would be possible to illustrate a whole treatise on how to secure assent without reflection, entirely with examples from the works of these authors, and others of the same period resembling them in everything but genius. A couple of random examples must suffice here. Mr. Chesterton talks of “Dickens, the greatest of whose glories was that he could not describe a gentleman,”—a splendid sentence to round off a chapter, one that has no doubt stimulated many a gasp of delighted appreciation before the page has been turned over. If any reader had been so eccentric as to leave the page alone until he had turned over the sentence in his mind, he must have perceived that he was being made the victim of bluff. The glory of an author, let alone the greatest glory of one of the greatest of authors, can hardly consist in his having failed to master any part of his craft. Besides, it is a pointless libel on Dickens to invest him with such a glory, and if Mr. Chesterton had seriously convinced himself that Sir Leicester Dedlock, for instance, and Twemlow, are incompetently delineated, it was surely up to him to have persuaded his reader’s

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judgment, instead of attempting to stun it with an assertion.

Or let us take an example of Mr. Shaw's method of argument. He is pursuing his customary course of taking some accepted opinion, and asserting, in the most unqualified manner, its exact opposite—no doubt an excellent way of scoring sensations. The contrast is between England and Ireland, and the point to be established is that the Irishman is by nature, or rather by climate, a clear-headed realist, and the Englishman a muddle-headed sentimentalist. To prove this, Wellington is set up as "an intensely Irish Irishman" against Nelson as "intensely English Englishman". Of course the intensely Irish Irishman might just as easily have been Goldsmith or Burke or Sheridan, and the intensely English Englishman Sir Robert Walpole, or the younger Pitt, or Lord Salisbury. But the sleight of hand is no doubt good enough to enable Mr. Shaw to pass off an incredible stage ass, in the shape of Tom Broadbent in *John Bull's Other Island*, as this typical Englishman, and then, by a really superb piece of audacity, to review the reviewers of his play under the caption "How Tom Broadbent took it."

Mr. Shaw and Mr. Chesterton thus succeeded in creating a style that was singularly well adapted to the demands of their age and audience. Every paragraph, and almost every sentence, was designed to act as a violent stimulus, to keep the reader perpetually alert and surprised. The form of neat intellectual brandy provided by paradox was administered in constantly repeated doses, and the more violent and even outrageous the stimulus, the more favourable was the reaction likely to be. It was necessary to adopt a deceptive transparency of statement, to give the effect of hitting the nail exactly on the head every time or of having brought off a series of neat conjuring tricks. Such was the art of the successful

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platform orator scoring off hecklers—an art of which Mr. Shaw himself was a past-master. But its whole secret depended on reflection being eliminated. The conjurer hurries on to the next trick and the orator to the next point as soon as the applause has subsided. It is only by a tedious process of following the argument point by point, and checking and examining each separate statement, that the trick can be detected. In a hurried and unreflective age such a method of exposure is not likely to be popular, or indeed practicable.

Who indeed was likely to undertake the task? An author, once his fame was fairly established, was as immune from exposure as a patent medicine, and for much the same reasons. His reputation was a valuable vested interest, not only to himself but to his publisher, and indirectly, to the newspaper proprietor in whose columns the book was advertised. From a business point of view, there was nothing to gain and a good deal to be lost by tilting at an established reputation. The advertisers did not like it; the public did not want it; the critic himself was usually an author and dependent on the goodwill of his fellow-authors. Reviewers who made trouble were seldom in active demand with editors. There was scope enough for candour at the expense of that great army of the “unarrived” whose struggles to find a market for their works were a stock joke of the magazines. In dramatic criticism, the assimilation of reviews to advertisements went so far that one of the great evening papers was actually threatened with a libel action on account of a first night criticism which, though in no sense a slating, had its praise sufficiently qualified to be likely, in the manager’s opinion, to decrease box-office receipts. The editor stood firm, and with such a flourish of trumpets as to provide the main item of an evening’s entertainment—but in face of such an experience, no

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editor, who valued a quiet life, would have any reason, except one of quite unprofitable principle, for allowing his critics to fall foul of the next highly capitalized musical comedy at a leading West End theatre. This was no doubt an extreme case, but no one who has followed the course of twentieth-century journalism can doubt that—however many and honourable the exceptions—the tendency has inevitably been for criticism to follow the line of least financial resistance. As Mr. Bernard Shaw's typical critic puts it, "If it's a good author, it's a good play"—or, of course, book.

Mr. Shaw himself and his peers had, by long and uphill endeavour, won to the position of good authors, and they had their reward in the ability to get away with anything in, and a good many things beyond, reason, without fear of serious criticism. But even these untroubled heights are not without their dangers. It has been said, "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you." If the genius has risen by virtue of his specific talent as a mountebank, and has only to go on performing his acrobatics in public to command wealth, fame, and a hope full of immortality—if, in short, he has gained all the world has to offer, then, indeed, it is time for him to look to his soul.

But real life is no Faustian melodrama, in which souls are either saved or damned outright, nor, when the coinage of thought is debased, does it necessarily follow the course of the mark or the ruble. Genius usually contrives to strike some sort of compromise between God and Mammon, though as the sound medieval practice of putting down the thing in black—or rather red—and white has been abandoned, the agreement is apt to be a rather confused and fluctuating affair. It was not the mountebank in Mr. Shaw who crowned the achievement of a lifetime with *Saint Joan*—but it was the old mountebank who raised the old cackle by trotting out the old "typical" cock-



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shy Englishman, the Britannicus-Swindon-Broadbent-Stephen Undershaft-Edstaston in his latest incarnation as Stogumber. And perhaps it was neither the genius nor the mountebank, but merely the journalist in a hurry, who produced the philosophy of the Life Force, which is neither life, nor force, but our old friend, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Deity, dressed up in a suit of motley, and never quite able to make up His mind whether to be an impersonal principle, or a rather unprincipled person capable of setting traps like any pimp or matchmaking mamma.

It is undoubtedly the journalist in a hurry who time and again stepped in to mar the great work that Mr. Wells set himself to accomplish in pointing the way out of chaos to a world order based on rational and scientific principles, and the even greater work of educating his contemporaries towards fitness for such a Utopia. If only he could have cut down the quantity of his work by purging it of ill-considered and half-baked accretions, could he have eliminated, by a species of psycho-analysis, one or two innate and recurrent prejudices of an emotional origin, how greatly would its permanent value have been enhanced! If, finally, Mr. Chesterton had been able to prevent his trick of paradox from becoming his tyrant instead of his slave, had he been able to substitute the detachment of the philosopher for the bias of the propagandist, had he relied a little more on facts and a little less on verbal gymnastics, how great a service might he not have accomplished in warfare against the shams of a materialistic age, and in championship of such almost lost causes as those of freedom, romance, and idealism!

And if even these gifted and sincere men could yield to the temptation of debasing the coinage of thought, what could be expected from the innumerable lesser guides to whom a half-literate public looked for its enlightenment? Would not the inevit-

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able result be, kill the faculty of reflection and substitute responsiveness to stimulus? The blind led by the blind may conceivably stumble clear of disaster, but a mob, obedient to the mass suggestion of those whose interest is to exploit its passions commercially, must inevitably head for disaster, because the most profitable of all passions to exploit are those that tend to universal suicide.

## CHAPTER V

### THE HUMAN TOUCH

There is a reply that is often and plausibly made to those who view the drama of modern life in the light of a tragedy, consisting in the failure of modern Man to adapt his nature to an environment he himself has revolutionized. "Look," we are told, "at the advance that has been made not only in material comfort, but in kindness, in philanthropy, in fellow feeling. Think what it was like in that polished eighteenth century, when women were flogged in public and an accused man could still be pressed to death for refusing to plead. Think of the horrors of the early factory system, of the devilry involved in the employment of child chimney-sweeps, of the cock-pits and bull-rings that flourished well on into the nineteenth century. Come nearer to our own time, and consider the coarseness, the brutality, that underlay the smooth surface of Victorian respectability. Think even of the picture of school life drawn by Mr. Kipling in his *Stalky and Co.*, when children were scientifically tortured till they fainted from the agony of it. Think of what a slum was like before the least attempt was made at State regulation, of the prisons in the days of the crank and treadmill, of the workhouses under a regime of naked Bumbledom. Think of what is implied in the fact that even in Horatia Ewing's books, it was still evidently a favourite boyish amusement to drive dogs mad with fright by tying tin kettles to their tails. And admit that there was a sweeter, kindlier spirit abroad at the beginning of the twentieth century, than at any time in those which had preceded it."

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All this is fairly put, and worth saying, but it is not the whole truth nor even the most important part of it. Let us give the modern age, in general, and compulsory education, in particular, the credit for a substantial measure of de-brutalization. But even here we must remember that signs of progress can be deceptive, and that progress itself is apt to be disappointingly patchy. Mr. Shaw, indeed, writing in 1903<sup>1</sup> goes so far as practically to deny that there has been any real progress in modern civilization at all. One suspects this of being a *tour de force* of Shavian rhetoric, but certainly some telling points are scored—one horrible incident in the South African War when the relatives and friends of a prisoner<sup>2</sup> were forced to witness his execution “hardly”, as Mr. Shaw puts it, “leaves us a right to plume ourselves on our superiority to Edward III at the surrender at Calais.” And the future held Denshawai and Amritsar and the Black and Tans.

But grant that there was perceptible progress towards the softening and humanizing of life—this change, being mainly emotional, and having no fixed basis of principle, was subject to inevitable limitations. It was seldom strong enough to prevail when self-interest was enlisted at all strongly on the other side. Thus great and genuine philanthropists like John Bright had discovered conscientious objections when it had been a question of humanizing conditions in their own factories. And progress in the restriction of cruelty to animals had been brought up short against the opposition of the nobility and gentry, who would not tolerate any form of humanity that threatened to curtail their sport, and prudently refrained from opposing such plebeian abominations as the public coursing of hares, because it was felt

<sup>1</sup> *The Revolutionist's Handbook*, Chap. VIII.

<sup>2</sup> I think Commandant Lotter, one of the Cape Dutch in arms on the Dutch side, and therefore a traitor.

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that if the mob had its simple cruelties curtailed, it might well retaliate in kind. And yet the encouraging of fierce dogs to fight a not unwilling bull had been less inhuman than a successful day with the beagles or otter hounds.

Positive selfishness was inextricably mixed with a negative factor, lack of imagination. Out of sight was out of sympathy. The facts of poverty were not known or not realized by the more prosperous section of the community. The kindly squire who was always ready to relieve a case of distress on his estate was unmoved by the reality of under-feeding in Canning Town or of over-crowding in Glasgow tenements, and did not want these unpleasant facts thrust under his nose. The suburban householder, who was hard enough put to it to keep up necessary appearances on an exiguous salary, did not care to be told of the even greater difficulties involved in existing at all on something like a pound a week. Consequently the member of the possessing classes—even if his possessions were small—was readily amenable to any suggestion that those who claimed a priority of public attention for the condition of the “have-nots”, and thought any increase of rates or taxes a lesser evil than its continuance, were corrupt, unpatriotic and intolerable agitators. And as he was ready to pay for what most tended to his peace of mind, it was obviously for the advantage of those who supplied him with printed matter to ply him with such suggestions. And, conversely, when journalism began to fish for the coppers of the “have-nots”, it became equally profitable to draw a picture of society in which the “haves” were heartless and vicious robbers :

For us unemployment, for them mad enjoyment.

Finally, and most important of all, the intensive cult of national egotism, that had already, on the Continent, come to prevail absolutely, and even in

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England was fast superseding the old Liberal idealism, had the effect of limiting sympathy by frontiers. It was not patriotic to evince any concern over the sufferings of those who were either openly or potentially enemies, or to arrive at any conclusion, on grounds of humanity or justice, that could be regarded as besmirching the honour of the flag, the army, or the nation. No sympathy was allowable that tended in any way to prejudice national interests—even when these could be reckoned in terms of *£ s. d.*—still less to weaken the national will to unlimited victory once a combat had been joined. When Mr. Birrell had talked about hecatombs of slaughtered babes in the South African concentration camps, his offence against patriotism had been judged, if anything, more obnoxious, from the fact that the babes had actually perished not in hundreds, but in thousands—a statistical point that ill-wishers abroad would not fail to drive home. Patriotism, of a rather different type, might take comfort from the fact that England was about the one country any one of whose prominent politicians would have dared pass such criticism on his own nation in arms.

When we say, therefore, that the early twentieth century was a time when a void of religious faith was to some extent filled by a growth of humanitarian sentiment, we must add that such growth is subject to strict limits imposed by :

- (1) Lack of knowledge and imagination.
- (2) The countervailing impulse of egotism, which is strongest of all when it is shared in common by a class or people.

Bearing this in mind, we can say that the nearest approach to a national religion did not consist in formal Christianity, in any of its versions, but in something that eluded definition, a consensus not of faith, but of feeling. Was it the religion of all sensible men, a phrase that has been fathered on at least four

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celebrities but can hardly have originated very far off the eighteenth century? Not exactly—the cult of sense without sensibility was as dead as Jane Austen. We should rather be inclined to define it, if defined it must be, as the religion of all good fellows.

A phrase rife in the new journalism was “the human interest.” This, in its highest form, might have been identified with Shakespeare’s “milk of human kindness.” In this sense it may be said to be the inspiration of that man of letters who seems most of all representative of this time, John Galsworthy. Galsworthy surveys the social system of his own time, and that immediately preceding it, with a gentle penetrating sympathy that seems resigned to its own helplessness. He has none of Thomas Hardy’s high stoicism in the face of destiny, none of Mr. Wells’s bustling desire to get something done, no Shavian patent medicine of equalized incomes. He is sorry, as a sympathetic observer may be sorry, who can blame no one because he understands everything too deeply. One feels that if Mr. Galsworthy had lived in the time of the New Testament, he would never have taken a whip of small cords to a hard-worked dove-seller, with probably a wife and family to maintain—he would far more probably have given the poor fellow a good price for his wares, and then have opened all his cage doors. There is one story of his of a pathos almost intolerable, about a puppy turned adrift upon the cruelty of people who are not cruel, but only frightened and wrong-headed. Poor puppy! And poor, poor people gone wrong! That is what one feels about Galsworthy’s wasters and thieves and prostitutes—even about his bullies and Pharisees.

There is a curious ineffectiveness about Galsworthy’s creations that makes his work more than ever representative of the time. Life, as he visualizes it, does not reply to environment. His characters drift; they are whirled helplessly along the rapids of their destiny

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with the waterfall booming in earshot. The best of them can do no more than go down with colours flying. But not even the best of them can be a hero in the true sense of commanding his fate.

A kindred spirit is that of Mr. John Masefield, who leapt into fame by accomplishing the feat, unique in Edwardian literature, of writing long narrative poems that read as easily and as interestingly as novels. Mr. Masefield is pre-eminently a poet and dramatist of the human interest. His compassionate sympathy with all mankind is as great as that of Galsworthy. But like his, it is a curiously ineffective sympathy, and this despite Mr. Masefield's love of the open air and passion for the sea, despite the violence and brutality in which his muse not infrequently luxuriates. The best that Man can do is, like Pompey, to stand fast for his principles and be crushed; like Dauber, to find his manhood for a few strenuous weeks on a Cape Horn sailing ship, before he lies, smashed and breathing out his last on the deck; like Jesus, to allow himself to be crushed for the truth that is in him, a Jesus whom Mr. Masefield somehow contrives to make a pathetic rather than a divine figure. Mr. Masefield's advice, and what seems to be, for him, the conclusion of the whole matter :

Best trust the happy moments. What they gave  
Makes man less fearful of the certain grave,  
And gives his work compassion and new eyes. . . .

is but a more strenuous and distinctively Western rendering of Omar-Fitzgerald's

Ah, make the most of what we have to spend  
Before we, too, into the dust descend,  
Dust unto dust and under dust to lie. . . .

A love of humanity, then, charity without faith or hope, save of the most shadowy, is the essence of this religion, or substitute for religion. It was, of course, by no means original. It was now more than half a



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century since Auguste Comte had tried to get rid of all theology and metaphysics, and substitute a formal cult of humanity, but this had never taken a hold on the popular imagination, in spite of a small and earnest Positivist sect, including that evergreen Victorian, Frederic Harrison. Mrs. Humphry Ward, with her attempt to put Christianity on its legs by equating it with philanthropy, may be accounted a prophetess of the new humanism. But it was only with the passing of the Victorian age that it became an effective influence, a safe motive for a best seller. The two great sentimental novelists of the time, Hall Caine and Marie Corelli, were in the forefront of the movement. Marie Corelli even created an interesting youth who in some vague way reincarnates Christ, and in that capacity gives poor old Leo XIII, who duly shrinks into the semblance of a mummy, a thorough dressing down about neglecting the poor at his gates. That the same gold mine was workable after the War was triumphantly demonstrated by Mr. A. S. M. Hutchinson.

It made little difference to the new humanism whether or not it denied Christianity altogether or merely brought it up to date, by adopting a Bowdlerized version of Christ Philanthropist. That silver-tongued preacher, the Rev. R. J. Campbell, drew packed congregations Sunday after Sunday to listen to his exposition of the New Theology at the City Temple, though the newness of the theology mainly consisted in the absence of any theology at all, and a compensating abundance of emotional uplift tinged with Socialism.

Journalism, of course, exploited the human interest for all it was worth. The plain, blunt journalist who loved his neighbour was in marked favour with editors. Social problems, treated in the human way, were excellent copy. The man who exploited the human touch to the greatest advantage was among

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the most remarkable, though not the most fortunate, magnates of the new journalism. This was Mr. Horatio Bottomley, who, in 1906, started *John Bull* as a penny rival to Mr. Labouchere's *Truth*. The success of this new weekly was due in no small degree to the personality with which the editor succeeded in confronting his public. He stood forth as a man of no dogmas and no inhibitions, a jolly, downright Englishman with a hatred of cant and humbug and a heart—as the saying is—as big as a whale.

*John Bull* was the Penny Truth, and truth-lover was its English editor. If you saw a thing stated *there*, you felt that it was so. *Cor ad cor loquitur*. The penny magazine public felt that it could not only trust but love Mr. Bottomley. His constituency of Central Hackney was one of the most unassailable in England. He could be accepted, like Bolingbroke, as guide, philosopher and friend, for he was fully capable of applying the human touch to most of the difficulties of human life. Also like Bolingbroke, he dreamed of heading a patriot, or, as he phrased it, a business government, that should stop the prating of the politicians and get things done honestly and competently at last. To many, this seemed an obviously good idea, and such a hold had it taken, that in the darkest days of the Great War, Mr. Bottomley was seriously talked of as the destined saviour of his country.

It is important to note the date of Mr. Bottomley's advent as high priest of the new humanism, for his genius, like that of other more permanently successful press bosses, consisted in his realization of the precise sentiment it paid to exploit at the particular moment. In the eighties the pioneers of the new journalism were still Victorians in spirit—Newnes, with his self-conscious respectability of the petty bourgeois and his *flair* for snippets of information; Stead, with his Puritan zeal broadening into Liberalism. The Harms-

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worths, though they started in the footsteps of Newnes, built up their distinctive fame by exploiting the spirit of the nineties, their love of everything big, their cult of the broken record, their patriotism that bursts its lungs. The next arrival, Mr. Pearson, soon became identified with the business version of Imperialism associated with the last phase of Mr. Chamberlain's career, a cause which Alfred Harmsworth, who was too great a journalist not to adapt his enthusiasm to his decade, executed a complete *volte face* in order to embrace. Finally Mr. Bottomley, who arrived in 1906, perceived that the moment had come for the exploitation of a human sentiment ostentatiously dissociated from any sort of formal belief or inhibition, and resulting in a sort of jolly-good-fellowship all round.

That such good-fellowship might be sufficiently elastic to permit the weekly trouncing, without ruth or measure, of foreigners, Puritans, and all sorts and conditions of selected human cock-shies, is by no means to the point. The perfect journalist has a tact that rises superior to the intransigence of logicians. It is the advantage of sentiment without dogma, that you are never brought up against some unyielding snag of principle. And before we tax the High Priest of the new humanism with inconsistency, let us remember that the very word implies the existence of something fixed and definite to which you can be consistent. You can take your stand on a principle, or a dogma, but hardly on a sentiment.

We may seem to have travelled a considerable distance from the humanity of Mr. Galsworthy and Mr. Masfield to that of Mr. Bottomley. But each nature reacts to the spirit of the time in its own way, and the point I am trying to establish is that, in the years before the War, there was abroad a sentiment of human kindness and good fellowship that served to some extent as a substitute for religion.

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Scarcely, however, as an effective substitute. Even in its highest manifestations, this mere sentiment had none of the drive or definiteness of a genuine religion. It remained powerless either to inspire a comprehensive remedy for social conditions that everybody agreed in deploring, or to mitigate the egomania that was driving the nations to suicide. There was not present the will to implement it, or the faith of which that will is born. It was not to men of good feeling that peace on earth was proclaimed.

## CHAPTER VI

### KNOCKING AT THE DOOR

There is, among the pre-War cartoons of Mr. Max Beerbohm, one, in 1913, depicting the reactions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the "Progress, or whatever it is" of the twentieth. The new century is seen sprinting furiously in overalls and goggles, panting and sweating, towards some unseen destination. Except for the aviation kit, that cartoon would have hit off the situation before King Edward's brief reign had run half its course. In whatever direction things were moving, there was no doubt about the speed, which was constantly accelerating. It was surprising in how short a time even the consciously up-to-date nineties had become so out-moded as to seem almost prehistoric. The *Yellow Book* was already fetching a good price as an historical curiosity. With the exception of Max himself, who, as he seemed never to have been young, proved likewise incapable of ageing, the brilliant band that had aspired to make all things new was dead or in process of being forgotten. Lionel Johnson was hardly even a name; swift oblivion had engulfed Harland and Cracken-thorpe; Stephen Phillips, who had been proclaimed as the elder Dumas speaking with the voice of Milton, fell so completely out of fashion that his pen was no longer able to keep him from the verge of starvation; John Davidson, who had declined from poet to prophet, found himself a voice crying incoherent Sadism in a godless wilderness, and put an end to his own life—bequeathing, as epilogue to his last testament, a lyric of poignant beauty, that to this day has escaped recognition.

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The remoteness of the nineties is emphasized by the fact that quite early in the century some of their leading figures began to be discovered and revived. Not only the fame but the very name of Wilde had been under eclipse—he was not the sort of person you would mention in the drawing-room. And then, in 1905, appeared as much of his self-communings in jail as a judicious editor thought fit to give to the world. The saintly attitude, as of a modern San Sebastian, and the haunting cadences of the prose, produced a violent reaction among a public that had forgotten the fierce passions aroused by the trial. Wilde's works, long out of print, fetched fancy prices, and a magnificent collected edition was presently put on the market. Among the undergraduate intelligentsia, there was a brief and vivid revival of decadence, that bore fruit, long after the scarlet sins and the absinthe had been returned to limbo, in a pose of humorous perversity. Other revivals followed—the Bodley Head disinterred Dowson, whose fame came to repose upon one poem—and with what unction did Youth call for madder music and stronger wine, or reel off the luscious Alexandrine,

Nightlong within my arms in love and sleep she lay.

Francis Thompson, too, achieved a greater fame in his resurrection than ever during his lifetime. And the Bodley Head, true to its once discarded allegiance, completed in 1901 a magnificent collected edition of Aubrey Beardsley.

The charm about rediscovering these worthies of the *fin de siècle* lay precisely in the fact that the times had moved on so fast and so far that they had already something of the fascination of antiques. It was the same with that other phase of the *fin de siècle*, its Diamond Jubilee brand of Imperialism. The sheer power of Mr. Kipling's writing would always command sales, but he was no longer the dominating

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influence he had been before the South African disillusionment. It was, in fact, rather the fashion among the new generation to affect a lofty scorn for Mr. Kipling—to nickname him a banjo poet, on the hardly sufficient ground of his having devoted one lyric to that instrument, and having invented a lilting banjo metre for the purpose. Henley and his imperial young men of the *National Observer* were almost forgotten, except for one or two lyrics—notably the one about “my unconquerable soul”—in anthologies.

Imperialism was by no means dead—even its eclipse was only temporary—but it had become at once less noisy and less unsophisticated than in the glad confident dawn of the Jubilees. It was no longer the flag of England and the White Man’s Burden, so much as Mr. Chamberlain’s ideal of the Empire on a Business Footing. It is perhaps not exactly true to maintain that you cannot write poetry about tariffs, because Mr. Kipling accomplished this very feat—but how many even of his admirers remember *Joseph’s Dream*? And that other ideal of a Free Commonwealth of Nations, that was destined to make the very term Empire a sentimental anachronism, had not yet found its bard. How, indeed, could such a one have been expected to arise, in an age of collective egotism whose touch with sanity consisted in a consciously unsentimental calculation of what patriotism would fetch? At least it can be said of King Edward’s age that it had too much good taste to blossom out, like that of his ancestor, the First George, into lyric raptures about commerce. Or perhaps it was that poetry was not accounted enough of an imperial asset to make it worth paying for.

There is nothing in the Edwardian Age to capture our imagination like the decadence and the Imperialism of the *fin de siècle*. The only thing certain was the utter discredit of all that the Victorians had held sacred. Not only had the old faiths been put out of date,

but faith itself had become a drug on the intellectual market, except in so far as it was capable of harnessing itself to economics, by setting its affections frankly upon the things of this earth, and adopting standards of material value.

Two instances may help to show what was the spirit of the youthful intelligentsia during these early years of the century. I trust it will not be debited wholly to academic patriotism if I refer to King's College, at Cambridge, in the time of the Carbonari and Rupert Brooke, as an intellectual forcing house not less successful in its way than Balliol during the mastership of Jowett. An extraordinary proportion of the men of that time have risen to distinction in various fields. There was, however, nobody among the dons with an influence comparable to that of Jowett, though Lowes Dickinson's rooms provided a *salon* for the exchange of advanced and God-quelling epigram. Youth was no longer content to let crabbed age have the moulding of its opinions.

The very name by which these young men chose to designate their clique was symptomatic of their attitude. The original Carbonari had been banded together for revolution. So were these of a later day, with gowns instead of cloaks and ideas for weapons, but they differed from the old Charcoal-burners in one rather more important respect, for to them Revolution was an end in itself, like Heresy to another society of advanced Cambridge men. They certainly flirted a little with Socialism, but they lacked the holy and uncritical ardour with which Victorian youth had flown to embrace its ideals. They had too much vital energy to be genuinely bored—boredom and Rupert Brooke could never have dwelt together—but a blasé superiority to enthusiasm was the pose they affected, and their red was not the plebeian bloody of flags and ties, but some rare nuance of *sang de bœuf* or *rose Dubarry* that marked off its possessor from the swinish



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multitude. Their Socialism, like Mr. Chesterton's orthodoxy, always had the piquancy of a paradox.

What they were thoroughly sure about was the necessity, in Nietzsche's phrase, of breaking the old tables. To be advanced was to shock somebody's prejudices—no very easy task in the atmosphere of consciously advanced Liberalism that emanated from the High Table. At last, however, something like success crowned their efforts. It was on the occasion of the Society's annual dinner, and one bold Bacchanal hit upon the idea of altering the word "bless" in the Royal Toast to its precise opposite.<sup>1</sup> But the success was significantly meagre. If such an insult had been breathed of the old Queen, in her latter years, the best that could have happened to those connected with it would have been to have secured their expulsion from the college authorities before their fellow-undergraduates had had time to execute sentence of High Treason under Lynch Law. But though there was undoubtedly a good deal of wrathful protest, no consequences worth speaking of ensued. The dons, though fully apprised of what had occurred, shrugged official shoulders and refused to be drawn. As for the undergraduates, dire things were certainly promised for the night of the approaching bump supper, but whether it was that the college boats had sustained an abnormal number of contusions in the hinder parts, or that the tolerance of Edwardian King's was shock-proof and treason-proof, the most that happened was the forcing of an empty room, and the destruction of three copies of the *New Age*. And in this the college may be accounted, in its new generation, wise. "The must," as Mephistopheles puts it, "may foam absurdly in the barrel, but at the last it turns to wine," and the guilt of Gallio is dearly avoided at the risk of casting out a Shelley.

<sup>1</sup> Not more than two or three, who did not include Rupert Brooke, appear to have responded.

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Such was the fashion in which the pick of the youthful intelligentsia was knocking on the oaks of Cambridge staircases, but another, and not less significant field of its activities, was the London School of Economics, the new branch of London University formed to deal with those sociological problems that were absorbing more and more attention in the new age. The School was then in its first period of youthful enthusiasm, and had not taken on the rather institutional and impersonal aspect of post-War years. Here there was no lack of enthusiasm, even in pose. The experience of one new arrival, who was promptly asked by the first lady he met in the Common Room, first, whether he desired to reform Society, and secondly, what he thought of the Great Realities, was by no means unique. For here men and women students rubbed shoulders on terms of comradely equality, and with a solemn determination never for a moment to allow the least suggestion of romance to mar the austerity of that comradeship.

The first two Directors of the School, appointed, as they had been, under Unionist auspices, were among the economic heads of the Tariff Reform movement, but the Director was a remote and shadowy figure who counted for little in the life of the students. The dominating influence, amounting almost to a spiritual dictatorship, was that of those two great leaders of the middle-class revolt against itself, Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Webb; there were few students who would not have deemed it an honour to be assigned the humblest part in those voluminous researches by which the reform of Society would, it was hoped, be expedited. For with all their enthusiasm, the ambitions of these young people were confined within the narrowest limits of specialism. To select or be assigned some hole or corner of the social field, and to work it up, after months and years of sedulous spade-work, into a sound but stodgy little thesis, was

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all ye did in sociology and all ye needed to do. It was to such as took up this burden that it would be granted to partake of occasional coffee in the Vatican on the Thames Embankment.

It must be remembered that the School exacted from its entrants not even that smattering of Liberal culture that is imposed on every candidate for a degree at Oxford and Cambridge. It was for the sole purpose of receiving a sociological training that they entered its doors. Add to this that so many of them were women with the woman student's immense and docile capacity for uncritical labour. They were, for the most part, without any defensive armour against authority—the impish iconoclasm of the Carbonari was not for them. It is true that they were strenuously and consciously advanced, but to be advanced was no more than to accept in blind faith the prescribed gospel of the moment. Not even the Professors, and hardly even the Webbs, commanded such blind devotion as Mr. Bernard Shaw, whose lightest utterances were quoted as the field preacher quotes his Bible, even when he came down to the School for the specific purpose of denouncing reverence.

And yet it was an atmosphere tingling with vitality. That serious and rather humourless enthusiasm of a generation back did succeed in producing a rich harvest of character. It was not all comedy, for tension without balance is more dangerous to some minds than wine to an empty stomach. But comedy there was, in the true Meredithian sense, lovable and very human, and there may well be survivors of those days who would gladly exchange their post-War disillusionment for the giant-killing optimism of a sociological fairyland, wherein the reform of Society was still a comparatively straightforward task.

I have selected these two representative specimens of what may be described as the vanguard of Edwardian youth. But we must not forget that the

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great youthful majority remained then, as now, obstinately lowbrow. The average undergraduate thought of his college boat and—not quite so enthusiastically—of impending examinations; the young fellow in Ealing or Maida Vale went to his job in the City and thought more of Marie Lloyd and the latest musical comedy than of Mr. Shaw; while as for the gilded youth about town, he had his sport, and his clothes, and his amours to occupy him, like his father and grandfather before him. But it is the leaven and not the lump that determines progress.

The title of a recent book recalls about as vividly as anything can the spirit of the time. It is called *Edwardian Hey-days*. Even though the foundations had now completely crumbled away, the magnificent superstructure erected by the Victorians stood as proudly as ever. What if there were fissures perceptible in the walls, what if certain subsidences were already to be detected—why invite trouble by meeting it half-way? To restore foundations, let alone reconstruct the whole building, was a difficult and expensive job at the best, and those who laughed at the old Victorian master builders had no particular constructive ideas of their own. The laughter died upon the wind, and the best intentions of the serious ended in uncreative goodwill or visionless specialism. The moment at least was certain. On, on with the dance! And if, low down on the Eastern horizon, black clouds were banking up, stabbed by occasional flashes of lightning—draw the curtains fast, and turn on a blaze of artificial lights! And if somewhere in the cellarage, nervous folk persuaded themselves that they could hear noises—then strike up fresh music, and let the light-hearted *abandon* of the Viennese Waltz be drowned in the tom-tom pulse beat of the jungle!

## CHAPTER VII

### EDWARDIAN ENVIRONMENT

If it was the way of the Edwardians to make the best of the moment, it can at least be said of them that they made it a fruitful best. In not only one, but every branch of creative art, work was being accomplished of the first, or all but the first, rank. Nor was it only a matter of a few exceptional geniuses. At long last there was a definite improvement in the standard of everyday taste. To those of us who cannot weep with the angels, it is a dire temptation to poke fun at the successive outrages perpetrated by the Victorians, culminating in the orgy of vulgarity that was the real naughtiness of the nineties. The new age had its faults—they were grave and vital—but it did at least contrive to preserve a veneer of æsthetic decency. Quite early in the century the bamboo-ware and Japanese gimcrackery were either put out of the way, or fell to pieces of their own accord; patchwork coverings vanished from sofa backs, and mirrors were stripped unashamedly naked of their decent drapery; the novelties that had jostled one another in the drawing-room were condemned to be broken up in the nursery; the photogravures of Scotch cattle were found to have slumped surprisingly in value when occasion arose to realize them.

Furniture was at last beginning to receive the impress of a spirit definitely modern. In 1900, at the Paris Exposition, was seen the triumph of what had for some time on the Continent been known as *l'art nouveau*. This style might at first sight have been taken as embodying, in an exaggerated form, the

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worst faults of the nineties. It was out to call attention to itself by ostentatious eccentricity. It outdid the wildest extravagances of the Rococo. Symmetry it abhorred; it was at war with repose. It sought as far as possible to abolish the straight line and rectangular surface, and to riot in curves of ever more bewildering luxuriance. And yet as interpreted by the one or two firms that first brought it into vogue, the new style was capable of producing some pleasing effects. This was only achieved by making every piece a separate work of art, a thing that could obviously no longer be expected once the new art had become standardized by mass production.

The style spread to England, but there it was modified by the dislike that almost every Englishman has of pushing a new idea to its logical extreme. William Morris had founded a tradition of constructional soundness that was proof against the dominance even of Parisian fashion. Accordingly the New Art in England never ran to the extravagance of its French original, and acted mainly as a quickening and refining influence on interior decoration. As in the time of Hepplewhite and Sheraton, English craftsmanship succeeded in taking to itself just as much of the new spirit as it could conveniently assimilate without breaking its essential continuity.

In so far, that is to say, as we can talk of craftsmanship at all. For now the problem of beautifying life was complicated by the very nature of machine-made civilization. No sooner did any new creative idea make its influence felt, than it was seized upon and standardized for mass production. The New Art owed whatever charm it possessed to its individuality, and did not lend itself to standardization.

It is therefore extremely to the credit of one or two prominent establishments, notably Liberty's and Heal's, that in spite of all temptations to make themselves cheap, they made of their business an art, a

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living art that strove to give outward and visible form to the spirit of its own age, and not merely to resurrect the forms of a dead past. For this was the besetting sin even of those who plumed themselves on their good taste in the early days of the century. The more the art of the past was studied and understood the greater became the tendency to let it smother that of the present. The vice of copying to style had never been so rampant, and the names of Bourbons and Tudors were shamelessly associated with the environment of the new rich. For people who were not rich at all, but merely genteel, an immense amount of shoddy was machined and assembled, in designs of warranted good taste, and bearing about as much likeness to the real thing as a two-shilling doll to a baby. As for most of the furniture supplied to the poor, cheapness and not beauty was still the quality aimed at, and ornamentation was tawdry, though there were surprising exceptions, such as the painted buckets of the canal barge community.

But in the upper class, and to a certain extent the middle, the improvement in taste was undeniable. The *fin de siècle* mania for overcrowding was at last beginning to pass away, and mistresses devoted themselves with a new-found zest for making their surroundings not merely pretentious but beautiful. The new appreciation of the past, if it led to the aping of styles, had at least the compensating advantage that it made people appreciate their heritage of predeceased craftsmanship. While the gimcracks and novelties went to the scrap-heap, pieces of valuable old furniture were rescued from attics and lumber-rooms, and the appreciation of these old things led to a demand for the same virtues of craftsmanship in the new. The mere fact that it was possible for one or two firms to make good taste a paying proposition is eloquent of the advance on Victorian standards.

The luxurious demands of the new century were

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reflected by a comfort in daily life such as no previous age had known. Among the proud aristocrats of the eighteenth century splendour and not ease had been the crown of existence. But to the twentieth-century plutocrat, money was the means of procuring the best time possible. In their heart of hearts, the Edwardians were not too sure of the future, but the present none could take from them, and they meant to make the most of it. The arm-chair became a day bed in which to sink and snore ; the bed itself was a delicate contrivance of springs, with perhaps a telephone in reach, and an electric fire near by that could rob the coldest morning of its terrors ; the bathroom was an Aladdin's cave, in which the waters were fragrant with salts, the towels were warmed on hot rails, and showers descended at command. But these were the commonplace adjuncts of moderately rich houses—to the very rich there were far superior satisfactions. One great captain of finance, Whittaker Wright, had so thriven by the promotion of companies that he was able to acquire an estate in Surrey, where, says *The Dictionary of National Biography*, "he surrounded himself with extravagant luxuries, erecting a well-equipped observatory and a private theatre . . . Hills which obstructed views were levelled, and armies of labourers employed to fill up old lakes and dig new ones." But the greatest of all these marvels was the billiard-room, which was made of glass, underneath an artificial lake. When, in due course, the owner of this Paradise was invited to change his residence for one of His Majesty's jails, his wealth did not desert him, for it proved capable of furnishing him with a timely euthanasia.

This new increase in luxury was no monopoly of the plutocrat. It spread far down and its influence was not unfelt even among the lower ranks of society. It was easier for mass production to turn out comfortable or showy than beautiful things, and it was only



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to be expected that as long as the machinery of international exchange continued to function, and the machines to produce for utility and not for destruction, a certain proportion of the benefits would be harvested by those who actually made the wheels go round. Not only was the standard of housing constantly improving, but the new big stores, and the synthetic materials in which they dealt, were making it an easier matter to achieve some sort of standardized smartness—already before the War the proportion of those who appeared on the cricket field unflannelled was diminishing towards vanishing-point, while indignant dowagers were gasping over the airs given themselves by the rising generation of domestics. It was easier, now, to convert the cottage parlour into a colourable sitting-room, with cheap new or second-hand furniture.

The pre-War time was one of strenuous building activity. A new generation of architects had arisen who were no longer bound by the merely imitative traditions of the Victorians. Even though the Christian faith was notoriously losing ground, King Edward was able to lay the foundation-stone, in 1904, of a Cathedral, overlooking the Mersey, that was the first of such buildings to signify anything whatever since the reconstruction of St. Paul's. The architect was a grandson and namesake of the famous Sir Gilbert Scott, the Panjandrum of Victorian Gothic, the man who had restored as much soul as he could out of nearly every cathedral in England, and showed how Gothic could be run up with absolute correctness of form, but no soul at all. The grandson's new cathedral was Gothic in principle—but with what a difference! The form was correct to no style of a past age, but expressed with majestic directness all—and perhaps more than all—that the master builder intended the stone to say. When—if the faith and resources of Liverpool ever permit—the scheme is

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carried to completion, it may yet be possible for the twentieth century to look the fourteenth in the face. Even the torso of the Cathedral is at present fit to justify the original application of that murdered adjective "awful".

But except for this outstanding achievement, it was not in church-building that the spirit of the age found its natural expression. The amount of money that was being made and spent called for an unprecedented activity of country-house building. This was not the sort of demand that had emanated from the all-powerful magnates of the eighteenth century, to whom an estate had been a little kingdom with the mansion as palace. Stateliness was no longer the overmastering motive. Many of these new rich did not want to be tied to the business of a glorified farmer. What they did want was a good time, to the utmost limit of their resources. And to do them justice, many of them aspired to homes which, besides being luxurious, should be also homely in the best sense, and emanate a sense of refined but informal well-being. It was in meeting this demand that the extraordinarily versatile genius of Mr. (as he then was) Edwin Lutyens found its happiest expression. The house with him was robbed of all the pretentious formality of the Victorian convention, and became the centre of a little paradise on earth with which it was as intimately connected as the head with the limbs. There is something of the spirit of *l'art nouveau* about his work. Buildings become plastic to his moulding and express themselves, when required, by the subtlest of curvature. To appreciate the wizardry of the Lutyens touch, one must study one of his houses—and the smaller and less formal the better—from several points of view. The observer will be astonished to find, as he strolls round, that the house presents itself to him in four or five separate and distinct aspects, each complete in itself, as if it

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were from that angle alone that the building was meant to be regarded, and each adapted with the most sensitive forethought to its visible environment. Only second to Mr. Lutyens was his future colleague in the creation of the New Delhi, Mr. Herbert Baker, who had, like Joseph Chamberlain, been able to broaden his vision by contact with the illimitable veldt, and had had his first great opportunity when Cecil Rhodes had employed him to design his millionaire's residence at Cape Town.

It was a many-sided architecture that flourished in the early twentieth century. It was capable of expressing civic pride by the erection of such noble public buildings as those of Cardiff, and, what was even more important, it was linked to schemes of scientific town-planning. A new type of Garden City made its appearance, though unfortunately it was too late to make any noticeable impression upon such accomplished outrages against health and beauty as Sheffield, for instance, and Salford.

The most significant art of an age is not necessarily that which is best from the standpoint of pure æsthetics. The Edwardian Age was one of feverish commercial activity, and that of a distinctively modern kind. Not only were the vendors of goods forced to advertise intensively for customers, but the advertiser of the new school did not aim at catering for an existing demand so much as at creating the demand for which he aspired to cater. He would go out into the streets ; he would penetrate into the homes of those with money to spend, and compel them to buy. The shops, and still more, the great department stores that were threatening to supersede them, came to regard their very architecture in the light of advertisement. The merit of a building was in exact proportion to its success in attracting customers. And of course the architect was expected to minister to this need, and to regard himself as an advertiser in building material.

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Accordingly a new style of commercial architecture came into vogue, whose principle was to sacrifice everything to creating an immediate effect, in order that the building might shout at the passer-by and blow its own trumpet louder than those of its neighbours. Every part that was not intended for this purpose would be as squalid as the rest was showy, craving no other merit than that of the maximum cheapness consistent with stability.

It was in this spirit that the citizens of London allowed the otherwise wanton destruction of what was, by universal consent, one of the world's fairest thoroughfares, the Regent Street of Nash. Here at any rate there was no nonsense about town planning—every building, as it elbowed its way into the picture, might do its damndest to attract attention, and the general effect could be left to chance. The genteel dignity of the Quadrant was shattered at a stroke by the irruption of a giant hotel, as gaudily overdressed as the cosmopolitans that big hotels seek to attract. "Eat, drink and be merry," it shouted, "so long as your money lasts, for that is all that life has got to give!" A few years later, a new era in London hotel building was inaugurated by the Ritz, overlooking the Green Park. Here the principles of steel frame construction were applied with a candour that would have been inconceivable in Victorian times. Here was plutocracy true to itself and without the least desire to pose in the trappings of the old aristocratic splendour. It was impersonal in the way that capital is impersonal. You were invited to turn so much wealth into its equivalent of luxury, and the thing would be done with all the well-oiled efficiency of modern finance. Whether you wanted to launch your daughter on the marriage market by a coming-out ball, or to honour your Saviour's nativity by a feast of friends, or to enjoy without effort or forethought the highest standard of conventional luxury

that the age had to offer, you had only to write your name on a cheque, and the thing would happen. And then when you left, or when the company in which you had embarked your savings went smash, another would take your number, and not only your existence, but the very consciousness of your having existed as a luxury-drawing unit would be obliterated. Steel-framed walls have no memories, and the new architecture that the Ritz foreshadowed, with its rectangular surfaces, and windows ranked like tombstones in a war cemetery, is one that deliberately aims at standardizing the individual, as machine parts, or tissue cells, are standardized. And what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

But the Ritz was sincere as few Victorian buildings had dared to be, though it was far from having attained the austere impersonality of the great blocks of post-War flats that are the latest development of this tendency. If it was an advertisement, it was at least an honest and dignified statement of what it had to offer. Not dissimilar in spirit were some of the great blocks of workmen's dwellings that were being run up—some of them under the auspices of the London County Council—a measureless improvement on the dreadful products of Victorian industrial anarchy, but more of barracks for Robots than homes for men. The difference between the millionaire's and the workman's barrack was mainly one of the model on which they tended to standardize their inmates.

As for the great shops and department stores, their appeal was to a more impressionable and far larger prospective clientele than that of the hotels. Naturally they aimed at striking the passer-by with an impression of opulence. The premises of Messrs. Waring & Gillow in Oxford Street are an excellent example of the Edwardian commercial style, with their flamboyant ornamentation, and the care-free

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gaiety of their invitation to a public of jingling pockets :

Full and faire ones, come and buy !

More profoundly symbolic are the premises of Messrs. Selfridge, a little higher up the old road to Tyburn. Here there is an imposing order of Ionic columns, that might at first glance seem the resurrected colonnade flanking some great altar of the Silver Age. But if you behold it from the other side of the street, it will seem as if this noble and sacred edifice were imposing its tremendous weight upon a foundation of glass, and you feel half afraid to go across and inspect the pretty things that the glass is intended to reveal. You know, of course, that there is no real danger of your being ground to powder, but if you are of an imaginative turn of mind the momentary impression may chance to start you wondering whether you are looking at a shop, or a temple—or perhaps an epoch.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE NINE AGAINST MAMMON

Commercial art is of no less historical importance than commercial architecture. The enlistment of the artist in the cause of mass suggestion is as old as the purchase of Millais's *Bubbles* by a soap company. Equally notorious was the similar appropriation of Harry Furniss's "I used your soap twenty years ago, since which I have used no other." But here the advertiser was content to come to the artist, after he had done his work for his own purposes, and buy what he found. But the new tendency was for the advertiser to employ the artist as he might an extra window dresser, and for art to pursue no longer its own æsthetic ends, but to measure its success by that of its employer.

So high were the rewards that commerce was able to offer, that it is not surprising to find artists even of the first rank enlisted in the service, and the poster exercising an unmistakable influence upon the picture. For poster design is an art in itself, with its own canons. Everything depends on the immediate effect—the advertisement has got to hit its victim in the eye, and it cannot waste time by announcing that it is going to begin. The advertiser has to do the whole of the work himself; he can expect no co-operation from the beholder. Such portraits as the *Mona Lisa*, or those of Rembrandt, on which you need to gaze long and lovingly in order to penetrate the depths of their meaning, would have been mere waste of hoarding space. On the other hand, one imagines that El Greco, with his effects that strike

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from the other end of the room, would, if he could come back to earth and condescend to prostitute his genius, command enormous prices, with but little change of method, as a poster designer—a fact that perhaps accounts for his belated recognition in pre-War years.

The artist of any sort who hires himself out for commercial purposes is, in an even profounder sense than the woman who trades in her body, a prostitute. It does not in the least follow that the advertiser-artist may not be as useful as Rahab and as attractive as Nell Gywnne. But there is a convention, and perhaps more than a convention, against this oldest of all professions as a career for those who, like the mothers and makers, hold the future in their keeping. This convention is most persistent of all in literature. Mr. Wells has told us how Bennett, Mr. Shaw, and another, whose name we can guess, were offered an enormous fee by a great general store to write its advertisements—and with full liberty to praise or blame as they saw fit. "They declined the proposal," says Mr. Wells, "as an infringement of their priestly function"<sup>1</sup>—remarkable words from one not usually suspected of sacerdotal tendencies. Another instance is that of an equally celebrated author, who, being asked to lend his authority to some patent medicine of the mind, replied simply that his pen was not for sale.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, members of the theatrical profession, with a few honourable exceptions, made no bones about lying to order about the merits, and their own experience, of any face cream, dentifrice, or automobile, whose vendor liked to purchase their signature, and there were even beginning to be society ladies of equally accommodating morals. It is an amazing proof of the way in which mass suggestion had come to dominate the public, that this transparent

<sup>1</sup> *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind*, p. 312.

<sup>2</sup> Others were.



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humbug was everywhere swallowed, and that the talents thus expended returned with heavy interest in the form of sales.

Poster art was developing rapidly throughout the early twentieth century. It was no less useful to the politician than to the shopkeeper. At the London County Council election, in 1907, the Moderate Party, which had so far failed to achieve a majority, altered its name to the more catching title of Municipal Reform, and conducted a tearing campaign against what it christened the squandermania of the hitherto dominant Progressives, a campaign of which the most effective weapon was a hideous face, reinforced by a pointing forefinger, which bawled from every hoarding, "It's your money we want!" This motto, which, whether or not it was a fair statement of the Progressive aims, would have been the truth at last if it had been transferred to practically any other announcement on the hoarding, was magnificently successful in putting the wind up a largely middle-class electorate. A similar technique could turn people into nervous wrecks by suggestions of disease, or into sots by plying them with stimulus to drink. But it was not for such crude work that Pegasus was harnessed. The real advertising artist was more likely to be found composing landscapes of a startling simplicity, and at the same time of a highly sentimentalized attractiveness, or else in devising harmonies and contrasts of colour calculated to excite a favourable reaction towards the goods with which they were arbitrarily associated.

The repercussions of this activity on art itself were by no means bound to be wholly unfavourable. It was something that an artist—or a musician for that matter—should acquire the habit of cutting æsthetic cackle and getting straight to his point. And the connection with commerce could not fail to have a certain effect in making artistic statement direct and

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vivid. In the exhibitions of that time, and even the Academy itself, the visitor could hardly fail to be struck by the resemblance of some of the most admired pictures, shimmering as they were with bright colours dabbed on in patches, to posters. But the art of the poster is also one of quick returns ; there is no depth beneath its surface, and it yields its whole secret to the first glance.

The impressionist style, which had originated in a desire to preserve the entire independence of art, thus turned out to be singularly well adapted to the ends of commerce. For commerce is a rich, cunning old rake who is never happier than in conquering an innate aversion. But impressionism was no longer, as it had been in the previous generation, the cause to which the young artists, whose work was most alive, pinned their faith. It is delightful to watch the shimmer of light on surfaces, or to catch some fleeting mood and fix it on canvas, but after a time one has longing for depth and solidity, and to exchange the fleeting for the essential. It is not that the new men wished to put back the clock to pre-impressionist ideals—impressionism had been tried and found wanting only in the sense that it had not gone far enough. Therefore the newest tendency in art was christened Post-impressionism, which may be interpreted as “all impressionism and something more.” It was born in France, that birthplace of new causes, and first obtained formal recognition from an English public at the epoch-making exhibition of 1911.

Here England was introduced for the first time to that mighty triumvirate of Cezanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh, as well as to the even more advanced and startling talent of Matisse. Here, it at once appeared, was something which impressionism had lacked. In Monet's landscape you had watched the hourly changing effects of light on pool or haystack, but Cezanne made you feel the mass and solidity of his Provençal

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hills; his very houses stood as four-square to the elements as the one in the parable that was built upon a rock. Whistler had imparted to drab buildings in a pea-soup fog the wonder and beauty of fairy palaces, but Van Gogh could take an old battered lodging-house chair, could set it before you in the full clarity of daylight—and lo, you would find yourself gazing on a thing of dignity and tragic pathos! What art has thus transfigured, let no man call common.

But this was only the beginning of the new movement. The point about Monet's haystack was that it was much more like a real haystack than any pre-impressionist picture could have been, and it might have been argued that Cezanne's houses and Van Gogh's chair were even more like the real thing. But these men had started a revolution with whose later developments they had no more in common than Liberal reformers with Bolsheviks. It would soon be enough to damn a picture for it to be recognizably like anything on earth, or for anyone but an initiate to be able to tell which way up it was meant to be looked at. A similar tendency was at work in sculpture, and indeed, to some extent, in all forms of artistic creation.

Obviously we have to deal with something of wider significance than a mere development of pictorial technique. The whole attitude of art towards civilization was changing fundamentally. We have two tendencies at work, and in conflict, both equally vital. The first is for machine-made civilization to capture and make a vulgar convenience of the Muse, the second is for the Muse to part company from civilization. And in this latter tendency there are again two phases to be distinguished. It had been enough for impressionists like Whistler to proclaim the absolute independence of art from everyday life, and to retire, like Walter Pater, into a cloistral seclusion from the Philistine world. But to the artists of the new move-

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ment, mere aloofness was not enough. Civilization was so much the enemy that it was necessary to wage sharp war against it. Accordingly we find the strangest developments, particularly in France, where ideas walk naked. We find one school of artists calling themselves *fauves*, or wild beasts, and another, rather later, dadaists, carrying unsophistication so far as to stammer and scrabble like infants. One of the post-impressionist triumvirate, Gauguin, shook the dust of Paris off his feet, and ended his life and career in the more congenial atmosphere of Tahiti, painting uncivilized life in a style of calculated harmony with his subject. The whole previous tendency of art to proceed from the crude to the refined was deliberately reversed; in a score of ways artists strove to adapt their methods to the demands of a primitive mentality. The very fact that a scientific age set such store by objective accuracy was enough to inspire a number of artists to cast out truth to fact or appearance as the deadliest of the Philistine virtues. From the Indian method of representing the same thing several times over to convey motion, the transition was easy to trying to combine several points of view in the same picture, to painting not only what was on but what was behind the surface, to making a portrait into the likeness of a jig-saw puzzle with all the parts cut up and fitted together at random, and finally to cutting loose from the visible world altogether and regarding a picture as a visible piece of music whose likeness is in the mind alone.

This same rebellion against civilization and all its works was by no means confined to painting. It is nowhere more powerfully displayed than in the sculpture of Mr. Epstein, with his desire at all costs to achieve the strength and simplicity of the archaic or pre-civilized mentality, and his austere avoidance of anything that might be mistaken for tenderness. Mr. Epstein has recorded his vision of the machine age

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in his terrible *Rock Drill*, an embodiment of power, stark, soulless, inhuman, beside which Watts's Mammon seems amiable and ineffective. It is no wonder that the "poor little street-bred people" have from time to time raised piteous squeals at the shocks Mr. Epstein has persisted in administering to their nerves. This terrible fellow who would make every spade a bloody shovel—no doubt of *his* being an enemy to civilization! As early as 1908, Mr. Epstein was employed to make some statues for the headquarters of the British Medical Association in the Strand. The statues are still there, and the few people who ever look up at them would certainly be surprised to learn that they were anything else than proper. But on their first appearance, a press and public that had not turned a hair at the destruction of Regent Street, foamed and dithered with a hysterical fury, as if it had divined,

By the pricking of my thumbs  
Something wicked this way comes!

In literature we hear the same cry of "Back to the primitive," and mark the same tendency to strip off the garments of civilization and uncover the raw passions of the savage. The gentle spirit of Mr. Masfield is incongruously possessed with sensuous delight in the raw oaths and crude passions of the roughest imaginable specimens of humanity. In 1908 John Lane, with an ear-splitting flourish of trumpets, proclaimed the advent of a new poet, Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie, whose work was at once acclaimed with almost as much enthusiasm as had greeted Stephen Phillips in the previous decade. Mr. Abercrombie chimed in with the mood of the moment just because he was able to impart something of primal brutality even to his metre, as, for instance, when a mother addresses her son:

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You weren't half cruel enough; you barely brought  
The red flames into my eyes this time at all.  
O, but it's good, the grip you have, and good  
To feel it on me, try the pains of those  
Who strangle. . . .

Cave-man stuff, this, of the highest literary quality!

Fauveism, or cave-manliness, was thus by no means the monopoly of one group of French painters. It was one of the most powerful tendencies of the time, and had its ramifications everywhere. Frank Harris aspired to be the lustful, all-conquering he-superman in real life, and did succeed in being the master bounder of a time singularly prolific of the species. Another example of this tendency was a strange being, T. W. H. Crosland, with a literary talent that might have borne lasting fruit, had it been employed for any other purpose than that of indiscriminate invective and abuse. He first achieved fame with an attack on the Scottish nation which might have been an amusing skit, had it not been for such incredible brutality as that of putting a bereaved father into the pillory for his too sentimental account of his little girl's funeral. But that was the worst of Crosland—he could never be really funny because his idea of fun was that of a Red Indian or a school bully, and his satire could never be deadly because it was rather too obviously the escape valve of a jaundiced disposition. So he just went on foaming at the mouth and looking for fresh things to abuse—women, Oscar Wilde, Jews, suffragettes, the countryside, the Japanese, most of his literary contemporaries—and all in the same strain of venomous jocularly.

Mr. Bottomley, the journalist who was nearest to the great heart of the people, saw the advantages of exploiting this method in his Penny Truth. Its open letters to individuals could be masterpieces in the art of giving pain—one, for instance, to poor old Oscar Browning, carefully advertised by posters at Cam-

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bridge. And one of the earliest features was a series of articles by someone calling himself Jim Crow, exploiting the most violent anti-foreign sentiment against one nation after another. And the common people, to judge by the success of his paper, and that of even greater lords of the press, gave the glad ear to any gospel of hate that could be bawled at them.

Here we have a strange and ominous division of civilization against itself. We have already tried to show the supreme necessity for some change in Man's nature corresponding to that in his environment, a progressive adaptation. It was bad enough that progress should so far have been confined to environment, and that Man should have created a world only fit for supermen, without attempting to become one. But here was something worse, for while material progress went on faster than ever, on the human side the cry was not forward to the god, but back to the brute. Even artists and visionaries were aspiring openly to become like wild beasts or children. Fauvism and Dadaism were no monopoly of the Quartier Latin. They were all-pervasive. If you had picked up any cheap popular newspaper, preferably one of those Sunday compendiums from which so many of the populace formed their notion of the world, you would have found it almost entirely divided into a Fauveist section, in which all that was foulest and most brutal in human nature was deliberately muck-raked from the week's happenings, and a Dadaist section, devoted to a cult of games and competitions so ludicrously exaggerated as to constitute an infantile obsession.

Nor was there so much difference of motive as might have been imagined between the sensitive artist shaking the dust of civilization off his feet, and the Philistine gloating over the latest murder or bellowing abuse at a referee. Each in his own way, the one by rebellion, the other by escape, was answering

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to a reality with which the conquest of nature had confronted the conqueror.

However ominous might be the significance of these tendencies, it did not prevent the Edwardian and pre-War time from being one of overflowing exuberance. It was not to be expected that English art would run to the logical extremes of the Latin temperament. There were, particularly during the hectic years immediately preceding the catastrophe, a number of English artists who vied with one another in competitive extravagances, hallowed by the magic termination "ism". But most of their work is not of the kind that courts resurrection, except in the spirit in which Victorian wax flowers are prized as curiosities.

Mr. Wells, when he hailed, with undisguised delight, the passing, in the twentieth century, of the great figure, was obviously thinking of his own art of literature. Had he turned his eyes to other fields of creation, he would have found the case reversed, for here the obviously dominating figure is even more *en evidence* than during the Victorian Age. Few will be found to dispute the supremacy, in their respective arts, of Elgar, Lutyens, and Epstein, and in painting, at the beginning of the century, the supremacy of Sargent was hardly disputed, but already before the War it was becoming apparent that a higher order of greatness was revealed in Mr. Augustus John. He was the English reply to the great Post-impressionist triumvirate, but his talent was less sharply defined than any of theirs; his work was less fitted to become the foundation of a school, or to provide a label for biographers.

Like that of Epstein, his art, in his first phase, is in defiant reaction against Victorian prettiness and sentimentality. He flings an ill-favoured visage into your face, bidding you like that if you can. Strength and ruthless sincerity are the qualities he aims at, and



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achieves. But he possessed too much of English sanity and humour to commit his genius to a life-long intransigence. The anti-Victorian phase was a bridge, to be passed over, not to be built upon. The culmination of Mr. John's career was still in the future, with that glorious portrait of Mme. Suggia, in which music seems to burst from the canvas—surely one of the world's supreme masterpieces. But enough had been achieved by 1914 to secure for John his place among the immortals, if only as a seer into the strong places of the human soul.

Since the days of the great and neglected John Riley, there have seldom been lacking masters, not always British born, to maintain the great tradition of English portrait painting. Thus when the cosmopolitan, Sargent, in 1910, transferred his genius to other fields, it was already evident that there was an Irishman, Orpen, who combined with an unsurpassed faculty for hitting off a likeness all, and more than all, of Sargent's capacity for tearing the soul out of a sitter, even when the result would have justified Charles II's remark to Riley, "Is this I? Then Oddsfish, I am an ugly fellow." Not that this was likely to be apparent to sitters of less intelligence than the Merry Monarch.

On the rest of the achievements of this intensely vital period of artistic production, space forbids us to enlarge. Our immediate purpose is with the answer to that ever more insistent query—*Quo Vadis?* From those makers who have preserved their freedom the answer is—"Full speed ahead!" Which, if you come to think of it, is rather less than no answer at all.



# BOOK III

## LIBERALISM ON TRIAL

### CHAPTER I

#### LIBERALS AND LORDS

By the autumn of 1905, it had become evident that not even Mr. Balfour's skill could prolong the life of the Unionist Government. Everything appeared to go wrong with his unfortunate rump of a ministry. Easily the most talented of his colleagues, George Wyndham, had fallen foul of the Ulster Protestants, and resigned his Irish Secretaryship. An utterly unexpected blow was dealt to the prestige of Imperialism when Lord Curzon, the magnificent Viceroy of India, quarrelled with that other strong man of Empire, his Commander-in-Chief, Lord Kitchener, and, failing to obtain support from the Indian Secretary, resigned in dudgeon. Mr. Chamberlain and his Tariff Reformers were now openly in revolt from Mr. Balfour's balancing tactics, and were clamorous to go to the country with a demand for a full Protectionist mandate.

Under these circumstances Mr. Balfour decided to try the chances of a last piece of finesse. He would not wait to be driven from office by the now inevitable verdict of the electorate; he would resign of his own accord and leave his opponents to form a Government if they could. Their two sections of Imperialists and former Pro-Boers had been at variance for years—the attempt to combine them into one ministry might easily result in widening the crack into an open fissure. But Mr. Balfour had proved too clever by half, and though it was only by the

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narrowest of margins that the split was averted, outwardly all was harmony, and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman succeeded in forming a Cabinet of all the talents, with the solitary exception of Lord Rosebery. It was a combination of impressive ability, and no one could fail to contrast it with the scratch team that had followed Mr. Balfour into the wilderness.

The new Government lost no time in taking the verdict of the constituencies. Popular feeling had been excited to an unprecedented pitch, and there were signs of a new spirit abroad that would have horrified Mr. Gladstone. Such sentiments were chorused as

Why should we be beggars with the ballot in our hand?

which Karl Marx himself could hardly have bettered. Violence and hooliganism were ominously *en evidence*—even Mr. Chamberlain was shouted down at Derby. A substantial turnover was expected, but even the most sanguine Liberal had not reckoned enough on the emotional suggestibility of the electorate. The cumulative effect of Chinese Labour and Passive Resistance propaganda, of the organized team-spirit of the Trades Unions, the almost religious cult of Free Trade, and the disillusionment that had followed the imperialist heroics of the nineties, was to stampede that comparatively small number of voters of unfixed sympathies by whom the fate of elections is determined. Even the bellowings of the two great yellow combines in favour of Tariff Reform passed, for once, comparatively unheeded.

It was early in January, 1906, that the first returns began to come in. A solitary election at Ipswich, on the 12th, went heavily in favour of the new Government, and on the next day, the landslide set in. The Unionists, including Mr. Balfour himself, were swept clean out of Manchester and Salford, and as day followed day, and the tale of disaster lengthened, it

became evident that Mr. Chamberlain's propaganda had aroused so violent an opposition in the Industrial North as to render it extremely doubtful whether a Unionist Party, committed to the imposition of food taxes, could hope to recover its majority in any circumstances. This, though its significance was lost on the Tapers and Tadpoles of the party game, was destined to be a determining political factor for the ensuing quarter of a century.

One solitary consolation for the Unionists was in Mr. Chamberlain's own city of Birmingham, which was as solid for Tariff Reform as Manchester was against it. This was no doubt partly due to his well-earned civic prestige, but perhaps even more to the fact that Birmingham, as a centre of the steel and armament trade, has a bias, that is as old as the War of American Independence, in favour of a militant nationalism. But the counties, the traditional strongholds of conservative sentiment, to which a Protectionist programme might have been expected to make its greatest appeal, only added to the record of disaster, and the depth of Unionist unpopularity might be gauged by the defection even of the safest seats. When the final results were declared, the party that had reigned supreme, with one brief interval, for the last two decades, returned to Westminster a miserable remnant, deprived of most of its leaders.

A fact of the greatest significance was that the Liberals, for the duration of the new Parliament, were, as after Gladstone's Midlothian triumph of 1880, independent of Irish support. The ultimately inevitable crisis, foreseen by Parnell, in which Ireland would hold the balance between the English parties, and therefore be able to dictate her own terms to the larger nation, was still postponed. The Liberals, having a free hand, were only too glad to shelve the question of Home Rule, which was no popular cause in England, and whose revival would give

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the House of Lords an excuse for repeating its tactics of 1893.

With an apparently permanent loyalty of the Industrial North to Free Trade, and the temporary freedom from Irish dictation, the prospects of the Liberal Party might have seemed bright beyond the dreams of optimism. But a third factor had contributed to the triumph, which, had the pundits only been capable of reading the signs of the times, might have adumbrated a menace more deadly than any to be apprehended from the official opposition. For on the Left of the victorious army had appeared a new and compact force of fifty-three representatives of the new Labour, or working-class party, allies whom the Liberals welcomed with the same effusive cordiality that the Romano-Britons probably extended to the sea-dogs of Hengist and Horsa. Of the fifty-three, twenty-four might have been described as hyphenated Labourites, pledged to some sort of support of Liberalism, but the other twenty-nine formed an avowedly independent party, pledged to a policy of Socialism very different from anything that would be likely to find favour with the prosperous gentlemen who crowded the benches to the right of the Speaker.

What did this imply? Hitherto the Liberal Party, though its centre of gravity may have been in the lower middle class from which sprung the great Non-conformist interest, had relied with confidence on the support of the working-class elector, who, when Disraeli had presented him with the franchise, had said, at the polls—"Thank you, Mr. Gladstone." It had been Queen Victoria's insistent complaint against Gladstone that he had deliberately laid himself out to attract the suffrages of the mob by exciting class hatred. After the formation of the Primrose League and the defection of the Whig aristocracy, it had indeed been the cue of the Liberals to represent themselves as espousing the cause of the Have-nots

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against the reactionary Haves. It was their card to trump the Imperialist ace. "Why should we be beggars with the ballot in our hand?" meant, quite obviously, that if the poor man voted the Liberals into power, that power would be used to confer substantial gifts on the poor man.

This was a game at which the Liberals could always count on outbidding a party calling itself Conservative, and relying to so large an extent on the support of the propertied classes. But it was unfortunately a game at which every party can be outbid by the one next on the left. If the poor man is taught to value his rulers by what they have to offer, it is only natural for him to close with the highest bid. If it is a question of exciting class feeling, then who can be so well calculated to implement it as one of the class from which you yourself are sprung? The appearance of a Labour Party was an advertisement to every working-class elector that the time was past for him to depute the sovereignty that was his by right to frock-coated capitalists, with a vested interest in things as they were. And as the menace from the left became more alarming, those who had anything to lose would naturally tend to gravitate towards the right, and to be frightened by any appearance of coquetting with Socialism. So that the Liberal Party appeared bound in course of time to be crushed between the Socialist hammer and the Conservative anvil.

Was there any chance of averting such a contingency? Certainly none whatever, if the Marxian doctrine were true of the economic motive being supreme in human affairs. But there are some who think more nobly of human nature, and believe that men are capable of being more strongly moved by their ideals than by their interests. It might be that the Liberal panacea of freedom would have greater attractions than the grim remedy of class war, and that the good old cause of Bright and Gladstone

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would be the good old cause still. But for that faith was needed—and was faith to be found in an age of such universal cynicism as the early twentieth century? Time would show, but meanwhile it was ominous that almost everywhere on the Continent the old generous Liberalism of the mid-nineteenth century had gone down before the advance of an all-conquering nationalism, with less sentiment about it than might inspire an average burglar. Meanwhile, what might have been certain to any far-sighted observer was that unless Liberalism could take its stand on its ideals, it would find itself, some day, with nothing at all to stand on.

To those who understood the inner workings of politics, it would have been apparent that the Liberal, no less than other parties, had come to rely upon support that had not the least connection with idealism. There was nothing Liberal in the accumulation of huge secret party funds, raised to a large extent by such flagrant corruption as the sale of honours nominally in the gift of the Crown, and jealously shielded from any sort of public scrutiny or criticism. There was nothing Liberal in the organized regimentation of the electorate that was the object of the great party machines, or caucuses, of which such funds were the driving power, or in the endless backstair work and secret wirepulling that such a system involved, the stifling of free discussion and the shameless appeals to collective emotion. It was no excuse that the Tories had freely availed themselves of such methods. It was for the now all-powerful Liberals to say with authority, "Let there be light!" But it was soon apparent that they, no less than the Tories—or, for that matter, the hard-bitten Trades Unionists of the new Labour Party—had reason for loving darkness rather than light.

A certain frothy arrogance was perhaps inevitable before the record majority settled down to the busi-



ness of translating progress into legislation. For a couple of days, in a congested session, the House of Commons resolved itself into an academic debating society in order that a predetermined verdict—that could bind nobody—might be registered in favour of Free Trade.

There was a different story to tell about Chinese Labour, that had been denounced on every hoarding and every platform as slavery under the British flag. Earnest Liberals had expected nothing less than that this iniquity should be put down with a prompt and strong hand. Nothing of the sort happened. The coolies continued to serve out their indentures on the Rand, and the wily Rand-lords had hurriedly issued some 14,000 fresh indentures with which the Government professed itself powerless to interfere. It was only under pressure from its own disillusioned rank and file that it decreed that no fresh indentures would be allowed. Even so, it was four years before the last Chinamen had left the Rand, and by that time it was possible to arrange for a supply of native South African labour without too much inconvenience to the mineowners. The Government's action, no less than its electioneering propaganda, was defensible on Machiavellian, but hardly on Liberal grounds.

The panacea of Liberalism was indeed applied, with conspicuous success, in South Africa, when the Government decided to scrap the transitional constitution that the Unionists had granted to the Transvaal, and to hand back to the annexed Republics a practically full measure of liberty under the flag. In spite of apocalyptic denunciation by Mr. Kipling, this dangerous, audacious and reckless experiment, as Mr. Balfour described it, led straight to that union of South Africa within the Empire which had been the goal of English policy in days before the blunder, that culminated in the first Boer War, had planted the seeds of hatred between the two races. It might

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have been fairly claimed that this one act of faith had accomplished more than two and a half years of fighting.

Work of a different order awaited the Government at home. No time could be found in the first session to lay the foundations of that social reform of which such high hopes had been raised. The interminable squabble between Church and Chapel in the schools, and the excitement that had been worked up over the Passive Resistance campaign, made it imperative that the leading measure should be called an Education Bill, though there was hardly the least pretence of its being designed to raise the standard of education. This measure was entrusted to Mr. Augustine Birrell, whose reputation as a man of letters was sufficiently high to have enriched the language with a new word. To Birrell a subject was to glide over it in a mood of urbane satire as if nothing were worth taking seriously. Mr. Birrell produced a very complicated measure which few ordinary people understood except in the sense that it was intended to favour the Chapel at the expense of the Church, that there would be rather more "simple Bible teaching" and rather less catechism, but that otherwise Tommy would derive about as much, and as little, benefit from his pastors and masters as before.

Meanwhile the grievance of the Trades Unionists had been redressed by a Bill that at first restored to them considerably less than the privileged position they had enjoyed before the ill-starred Taff Vale judgment, but which the menacing insistence of Labour got changed to a plain absolution of the Union funds from liability for wrongs committed by individual members in furtherance of trades disputes. The third principal measure was a Plural Voting Bill which, whatever its merits in the abstract, would admittedly have the effect of diminishing the Tory chances at any future election.

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These measures, having been duly voted through the Commons, were sent up to the Lords for the formality of endorsement. For eleven years, now, the man in the street had almost forgotten that there was a House of Lords, except for purposes of ceremonial. A few politically minded peers had duly assembled to pass such measures as the Unionist Government had succeeded in getting through the Commons by the end of each session, and the rest had wisely devoted themselves to their estates and their amusements. The Second Chamber had, in fact, since its great triumph over Gladstone's last ministry, come to function quite undisguisedly as a humble adjunct of the Unionist caucus.

This was the more to be regretted, as the need for some check upon the omnipotence of the Commons was hardly to be denied. To say that the popular will was accurately expressed by every measure that a disciplined majority voted through the Lower House, was an abuse of language too flagrant to be plausible. Not only were millions of voters worse than unrepresented, since they had actually voted to prevent their sitting members from representing them, but even the simplest voter's will was a more complex thing than could be comprehended by a cross opposite some unknown person's name. The man might be a Free Trader and yet an ardent Churchman, he might be equally against the Lords' veto and Home Rule. His decision was at best a choice of benefits or evils—more often he voted for his political team in much the same spirit as he cheered for his football team. And the blank cheque, that was all he could help to present to one party or the other, might, in the course of the next seven years, be used for any purpose that the bosses might dictate.

In criticizing the action of the Lords during the first three years of the Liberal Government, it is easy to miss the real point of the case against them. It

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is doubtful whether any of the measures they killed or mutilated were regretted by anything like a majority of the electorate, or whether any useful measure of social reform suffered vital injury at their hands. Their real guilt consisted not in their having done what they did, but the fact that they had not dreamed of doing anything before the Liberal Government came in, and that they would quite certainly cease from functioning the moment that that Government went out. Whence it might fairly have been deduced that the mainspring of their conduct was not loyalty to the popular will, nor yet a patriotic desire to get the best legislation passed, but was inspired by hope of advantage in the sort of skin game that was being played between parties, classes, nations, and empires, in these opening years of the new century.

If it was a game, the Lords played their hand—or perhaps it would be more correct to say that the Unionist Party played its Lords—with a combined subtlety and boldness that reveal the master touch of Balfour. Scarcely anybody would have ventured to predict that the Upper Chamber would dare tamper with the leading measures of an enormous majority, fresh from its victory at the polls. It was an entirely different matter from flouting Gladstone's Minority Government, kept in power, and subjection, by the Irish vote. There was no precedent, since the days of the Fox-North Coalition, for such an assertion of hereditary against representative privileges. When, in 1882, Gilbert, in *Iolanthe*, had congratulated the Lords on doing nothing in particular and doing it very well, the sentiment had passed so much as a matter of course that even hidebound Tories had only chuckled tolerantly. There had been a sort of gentlemen's agreement that the Peers should play a discreet second fiddle. But in the skin game, where even formal treaties are no more than scraps of paper, there is no honour for gentlemen's agreements.

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It was a shrewd calculation that Mr. Birrell's Bill had no real backing of enthusiasm, except among Nonconformist stalwarts who would vote Liberal whatever happened. The average man, who wanted to see fair play between Church and Chapel and had his doubts whether Mr. Birrell's Bill would be more likely to achieve this than Mr. Balfour's, was quite unmoved when the Lords added a number of amendments, designed to extract the sting from Mr. Birrell's clauses. Not so the Liberal majority in the Commons, whose amazed indignation could only find vent in rejecting the whole of the amendments, without condescending to discuss them separately. So the Lords quietly let the Bill die, and sent the Plural Voting Bill to join it on the scrap-heap. But for the passage of the Trades Disputes Bill, which had the formidable backing of Labour, their lordships stood politely aside, though there can be little doubt that they disapproved of it more vigorously than either of the other two.

And so, as one of the Liberal papers expressed it, "the whole herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea." The Lords must be mad to affront the majesty of the people thus openly! Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman used words of impressive menace: "The resources of the Constitution are not exhausted." This could only mean that the challenge would be promptly and boldly met by a reform of the Constitution, and that if the Lords were still mad enough to oppose their veto, the Government would invoke a verdict of the people, on behalf of its representatives, decisive enough to justify that wholesale creation of peers, whose very threat had been enough to secure the passing of the great Reform Bill. If the action of the Lords had been as flagrantly unpopular as, in Liberal circles, it was made out to be, this course would have been obvious, and a victory, more overwhelming and fruitful than the last, certain.

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But it was by no means certain that the fate of two notoriously partisan measures was calculated to arouse the requisite indignation among those voters of uncertain allegiance who determine the issue of elections. Nor had the Government had time, during its first year of office, to place any constructive legislation of importance to its credit. That it had ended the grievance of the Trades Unions was all to the advantage of the Opposition.

So the Government decided, after all, not to grasp the nettle, and Sir Henry resigned himself to the fact that, for the nonce, the resources of the Constitution *were* exhausted. The record majority was therefore forced to content itself with the empty ceremony of passing a resolution through the Commons, to the effect that the power of the Lords ought to be so restricted as to make it possible for the will of the Commons to prevail within the limits of a single session. Thus did Mr. Snodgrass take off his coat and announce with great sound and fury that he was probably going to begin—in four or five years' time. Their lordships could fairly claim to have scored heavily in the first round of the contest they had so audaciously provoked. The side that, even for the most arguable reasons, declines a challenge does not cut a dignified figure in the public eye. Even the dropping of the Education Bill aroused surprisingly few regrets; the Passive Resistance campaign petered out, and the hottest gossellers reconciled their consciences to ignoring the mystic distinction between rates and taxes. The country was, in fact, ceasing to be interested in the Church-Chapel squabble, and was prepared to put up with Mr. Balfour's or any other settlement that would end this perpetual recurrence of storms in the parish tea-cup.

The session of 1907 was not calculated to arrest the decline of Liberal prestige. The main measure was again entrusted to Mr. Birrell, who after the fiasco

of his Education Bill, had been transferred to the Irish Secretaryship, and offered an instalment of, or substitute for, Home Rule, in the shape of an Irish elected assembly, with no legislative or fiscal powers, but with a certain limited control over purely Irish administration. This Bill did not even get to the Upper House for rejection, since the Nationalists, well aware of their power to impose their own terms on any future Parliament in which the difference between English parties should be less than ninety-odd, contemptuously refused to countenance anything short of a full measure of Home Rule.

The Government did no doubt accomplish work of the first importance during this session, but hardly of the kind to arouse special enthusiasm among Liberal electors. Mr. Haldane, a lawyer-metaphysician, in whom a voluble tongue was conjoined with an incongruously lucid brain, accomplished a reform of army administration that had baffled a series of Unionist ministers, and not only transformed the old Volunteers into a far more efficient Territorial Army, but created a striking force of six regular divisions, fully equipped for taking its place on the left wing of a French, or Franco-Belgian army, at a few days' notice. Of course it would never have done to have openly envisaged such a contingency, still less to have revealed to the Liberal rank and file that the necessary arrangements between the three Staffs were actually being concerted.

During 1907, the Lords had been fairly quiescent, confining their functions of revision and rejection to some not specially important Land Bills—land being a subject on which peers were traditionally sensitive. In the session of 1908, the controversy between the two Houses flared up with greater intensity than ever. It was now time for the Liberals to placate an important section of their followers by a so-called Temperance measure, limiting the access of the lower

classes to strong drink. Such paternal compulsion could more easily have been justified on Tory principles than by Liberal doctrines of freedom and equality. But the Licensed Victualling Trade, like the Church, had long been in alliance with the Tories ; every public house was, to some extent, a focus of Unionist propaganda, and there perhaps lingered on some of the opposition between the jolly, roystering cavalier and the austere Puritan.

It was not surprising, under these circumstances, that an attempt to solve the problem on comprehensive and scientific lines should have been outside the scope of practical politics. Those who demanded temperance were stultifying their own professions when they sought to deny the poor the opportunity of exercising that virtue, and those Christians would seem to have been somewhat lacking in humour who pinned their faith to legislation that would have justified Pilate in condemning Christ as a wine-bibber and liquor-manufacturer. The cause of temperance, not to speak of liberty, would have been better served by providing that the poor man, like the rich, should be enabled to gladden his heart, when he felt so disposed, with unadulterated liquor in decent surroundings, instead of having to swill the poisonous concoctions that made him not drunk but drugged, in places that might have borne the motto of the legendary Chinaman, "No drinkee for drinkee, drinkee for drunkee !"

But the Liberal Government cared for none of these things. Its remedy for drunkenness was one for which the political were more obvious than the social arguments, and consisted in an endeavour to reduce the number of licensed houses, though it was at least a doubtful proposition whether a few large and proportionately crowded bars and gin palaces would conduce to less drunkenness than a larger number of smaller pubs. A drastic reduction of licences was to



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take place within a time limit of fourteen years, and though local option, or the right of a majority in any locality to bar the access of a minority to liquor, had been one of the principal causes of the last Liberal Government's *débâcle*, it was now reintroduced in a modified form.

Except among an earnest minority of coercionists, the Bill had no popular backing. It was, quite undisguisedly, a piece of class legislation, for no moderately well-off person, unless he held brewery shares, was likely to be seriously affected by it. It was too much to expect the poor man to enthuse for having his drunken habits reformed by his betters. Long ago he had voiced his sentiments in the thoroughly English refrain,

Damn his eyes, whoever tries  
To rob a poor man of his beer !

and it was in a similar spirit that he now warned Mr. Asquith, who, on Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's death, had succeeded to the Premiership,

If you try to tax the poor man's beer  
I'll meet you one dark night.

It was remarked—though few would have had the bad taste to write it—that by no means all those responsible for the Bill had the reputation of being teetotal fanatics, nor, when 200 Liberal members gave a complimentary dinner to Mr. Asquith, in appreciation of his conduct of the Bill, was there any stint of the good cheer customary on such occasions. Most significant of all was a by-election fought with extraordinary intensity on both sides in the dreary constituency of Peckham, which resulted in a Liberal majority of over 2,000 being turned into a Conservative majority of about the same amount.

Under these circumstances the opportunity for the Lords to inflict another public humiliation on their

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now avowed enemies was too obvious to be resisted. In rejecting the Bill they would be more representative of popular sentiment than the Commons in passing it. But they proceeded to do the obvious thing with an indifference to public opinion, and public decency, that recalled the god-provoking *hubris* of Greek tragedy. Before the Bill had been even debated by the Lords, some 250 Unionist peers met in the private house of their leader, Lord Lansdowne, and decided to reject it. This advertisement that no arguments that could be urged in favour of the Bill, whether by the King's Ministers, or by the Archbishop of Canterbury and his fellow-bishops, would be allowed to weigh in the balance against a pre-determined fiat of the Unionist caucus, was rather too cynical even for Edwardian standards.

For all that, the Lords had scored, and more heavily than before. There was not the least sign, even after the Lansdowne House meeting, of any widespread indignation against their proceedings. They had held up no useful or constructive measures—neither the Education nor the Licensing Bill

to such aureate earth was turned  
As buried once, men want dug up again,

and time was to show that not only the Bills themselves, but the very demand for them, could fade out of memory. The effect of the veto had been to leave the Government powerful for national but not for party legislation. But why only a Liberal Government? The Liberals had the human grievance of the boy who is caned for crimes with which his favoured brother gets away scot-free.

Certainly, at the end of 1908, the Liberal stock had slumped to an extent of which no one would have dared to dream on the morrow of the 1906 election. But there were factors in the situation that rendered it unsafe to stake too much upon the hope of a Unionist

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recovery. A general election, though it might ostensibly be fought on the constitutional issue, might be determined by quite irrelevant causes. So long as the Industrial North continued uncompromising in its allegiance to Free Trade, Tariff Reform remained an electoral millstone that Mr. Chamberlain had fastened round the neck of Unionism.

Besides, the Government was at last beginning to redeem some part of its promise of social reform. The grant of a weekly five shillings was made to such of the population as had passed the allotted human span, and whose income did not exceed £21 a year. Above £21 the pensions fell a shilling for every extra 2½ guineas of income, until, at £31 10s., it faded out altogether. This, though an exiguous enough dole in itself, was more than two Unionist Governments had succeeded in conferring, in spite of its being an avowed part of Mr. Chamberlain's policy. There were other measures, too, notably a Town Planning Act, by that now indefatigable bureaucrat, Mr. John Burns, an Eight Hours Act for Miners, a Minimum Wage Act for sweated industries, and one of a rather different order regulating the conduct of the poor towards their children, and imposing certain restrictions on the children themselves. There was also an attempt to render it possible to imprison certain persons, classed as habitual criminals, for any period whatever at the discretion of the authorities, though this was boiled down, under pressure, into the power of a judge to add an extra, but determinate, sentence to one passed in the ordinary way. Altogether, taking the good with the bad, the Liberal Government had at least given evidence of an energy and reforming zeal that contrasted favourably with the inertia of its predecessors. It was by no means certain that the electorate would want to change the new live wire for the old dead one.

## CHAPTER II

### DUAL INTO TRIPLE

Whatever else might have been thought of the Liberal Government, it was taken for granted on all hands that it stood for peace, peace—as its opponents complained—at almost any price. Ever since the Boer War, it had been the fashion to accuse the Liberals of being friends of every country but their own, if not actual traitors. It no doubt had a soothing effect when it became known that Lord Lansdowne's successor in the Foreign Office was Sir Edward Grey, on whose patriotism not even the wildest Jingo could cast a doubt. Sir Edward was steeped in the Whig tradition of his Northumbrian family, and bore the same reputation for inflexible uprightness that had distinguished his great ancestor of the Reform Bill. Even the German ambassador, who was not likely to be biased in favour of English diplomats, could report to the Chancellor that Grey impressed him as being “a frank straightforward man, and one knows where one is with him.”

Nor can there be the least doubt that Sir Edward Grey sought peace and ensued it with as sincere a devotion as that great Whig pacifist, Charles James Fox. But even of Fox it was admitted by the Tory, Sir Walter Scott, that when, at long last, he had had an opportunity of putting his principles into practice as Foreign Secretary, even he

A Briton died. . . .

E'en then dishonour's peace he spurned,  
The sullied olive branch returned,  
Stood for his country's glory fast,  
And nailed her colours to the mast.

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The same might have been said with perfect truth of Sir Edward Grey. In this he differed little enough from other European Foreign Ministers, who were all equally sincere in promoting the glory of their respective countries. But there was a world of difference between Grey and such statesmen as Bülow, Holstein, Isvolsky, Aehrenthal, and Sazonoff. Sir Edward was what his penetrating yet candid glance proclaimed him at first sight, a man not only incapable of lying, but of any speech or conduct in the remotest degree underhand. Even for the sake of his country he could never have condescended to the sharp practice that was almost a part of diplomatic routine—he would not have known how to begin. And hence, among men who knew no other way, and to whom every professed motive was but the mask for some ulterior design, the very innocence of his conduct sometimes had the effect of the deepest guile. Moreover, the straightforward simplicity of his words and actions did, on occasion, render him blind to the interpretation that, in the insanely sophisticated world of international diplomacy, might be put upon both. And he, in his turn, was liable to ignore the ulterior motives of those with whom he entered into partnership. To trust to the honour of others at the expense of third parties may be chivalrous, but it is not always just.

The significance of the change of ministers at Whitehall was considerably diminished by the convention, that Sir Edward was fully determined to honour, of the essential continuity of British foreign policy. He was content to take up the threads of Lord Lansdowne's bold and skilful policy, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he, like Lord Lansdowne, allowed the experts of the Foreign Office to play out the hand with a minimum of amateur interference.

Already, since the new orientation of British policy;

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tension with Germany had increased to an extent that rendered the possibility of a European War, with or without warning, apparent even to the man in the street. Rumour was already busy in exploiting the sensational possibilities of the situation. M. Delcassé's resignation was said to have been the result of a German ultimatum. And England was supposed to have covenanted with France, in the event of a rupture with Germany on the Moroccan question, to make a diversion by landing a force variously estimated at 100 to 120 thousand men on the coast of Schleswig. The evidence of Lord Sanderson and Lord Lansdowne, in the great collection of British Documents on the Origin of the War, is conclusive to the effect that no such promise was ever made, though it was certainly talked about in high quarters, and it is easy to guess its origin in the fertile brain of Sir John Fisher. But the German Government was certainly warned that if Germany attacked France in connection with the Entente, England could not remain indifferent, a sufficiently plain intimation that if there was going to be a war about Morocco, England meant to be in it. So near, in the space of one brief year, had the peaceful agreement with France come to developing into an armed alliance against Germany, thanks largely to the blustering and blundering futility of the Wilhelm-Bülow-Holstein combination.

Even if the Schleswig promise was a myth, there was nothing mythical about a regrouping of England's sea forces that was plainly directed against Germany. This was due largely to the appointment, on Trafalgar Day, 1904, of Sir John Fisher as First Sea Lord. In this consciously breezy sailor the spirit of latter-day Nationalism, in its most intransigent form, was developed to an extent to which it would be hard to find a pre-War parallel, except perhaps in the Balkans. He delighted in language of picturesque brutality.

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He believed, like Clausewitz, in making war at your own chosen moment, without waiting to be forced into it, and once the issue was joined, in unlimited violence, or, as he once humorously expressed it, in hitting your enemy in the belly, kicking him when he is down, boiling his prisoners, if you take any, in oil, and torturing his women and children. He also shared Mr. Kipling's love of the Old Testament, with its fighting and nationalistic Jehovah.

No sooner had Fisher arrived at the Admiralty than he commenced a campaign of furious efficiency. Even before the conclusion of the Entente, he had satisfied himself that hostility between England and Germany was, for commercial reasons, inevitable, and on the resultant war he concentrated the whole of his superabundant energies. Scrapping scores of obsolescent ships and withdrawing others from distant stations where they had been more ornamental than useful, he proceeded to shift the centre of naval gravity from the Mediterranean to the North Sea. The whole fleet was, in fact, marshalled for the sole purpose of applying to Germany, at a moment's notice, the Sea Lord's maxim, "Hit first, hit hard, and hit anywhere."

So thoroughly did Fisher succeed in diffusing this spirit among all those with whom he came in contact, that one of the Junior Lords of the Admiralty actually blurted out words that, being uttered in public, rang from end to end of Germany, plainly implying that England, like Japan, was capable of falling on her enemy without even a declaration of war. Of course the usual disclaimers and explanations were forthcoming, but the Germans were far from being convinced. They would have been even more disquieted, could they have known that Fisher, if he could have had his way, would have dealt with the German fleet, once and for all, by what he called Copenhagening it—a reference to not the most scrupu-

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lous episode in British history, when the Danish capital had been bombarded in order that, with no more shadow of provocation than Belgium was to offer Germany in 1914, the Mistress of the Seas might hack through a perilous situation by appropriating her neighbour's fleet. In other words, Fisher would, with or without excuse, have scuppered the German fleet in its own harbours. As these harbours were guarded by forts and mines, it is difficult to see how any seaman, let alone one so able as Fisher, could have hoped to carry out this purpose except by surprise against an unsuspecting neighbour. It is to the credit of Edward VII that, when Fisher broached this ultra-Clausewitzian project to him, he merely exclaimed, "Fisher, you're mad!"

Fisher, denied his Copenhagen, devoted his genius to scoring a more legitimate point at Germany's expense. He was one of the first to divine the coming of a new era in battleship construction that would render all existing fleets obsolete. The day of all-big-gun ship was at hand, and already an Italian designer, Captain Cuniberti, had planned a ship to mount a dozen 12-inch guns, instead of the customary four. Fisher determined that England should be first in the field with this type of ship, and the result was the *Dreadnought*, completed, by extraordinary efforts, within less than a year from the laying down of her keel plate. The charge often levelled against Fisher, that he had no business to start a new competition in *Dreadnought* building, in which England would forfeit the advantage of her previous supremacy, is merely inept. The *Dreadnought* followed logically from the new power of the long-range gun, which no one realized better than Fisher, and if England had not got the start, Germany would undoubtedly have seized it, a contingency that would have afforded some justification for panic-mongers.

When the Liberal Government came into office,



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Germany had become definitely the enemy, and the German Peril was already a catch phrase. The most influential organs of opinion were lustily engaged in torturing their readers into an agony of terror-stricken patriotism. The same Mr. Le Queux, who had already, in the early nineties, produced an account of a hair-raising Franco-Russian invasion, due in 1897, was turned on by the *Daily Mail* to describe an even more horrid and thrilling German invasion in 1910, and this was advertised in the streets of London—where the juiciest massacres were booked to take place—by a procession of sandwich-men, slouching along in the uniforms of Prussian infantrymen. It was no easy task for peace-loving ministers, when the slightest visible relaxation of warlike activity was enough to start a panic, and when it was a patriotic duty to take the worst possible view of everything the Germans said or did. And of course, precisely the same sort of thing was going on in Germany.

Meanwhile, the Conference on Morocco, that the Germans had rattled the sabre so hard to secure, came off early in 1906 at Algeciras. There was the usual comedy of diplomatists professedly sitting in council to arrive at a fair settlement of an international difficulty, but really each working with the single-hearted aim of promoting the interests of his own country. From the German point of view, the Conference was a complete failure, and had the effect of revealing that Germany had now not a single ally, with the exception of Austria, on whom she could count, for the third partner in the Triplice, Italy, was plainly beginning to coquette with the Entente. Any hopes that might have been raised at Berlin by the change of Government in England must have been shattered when it became evident that English policy was at the service of French ambitions in Morocco. When the Germans found the proceedings of the Conference getting out of their control, there was more business with

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the sabre—a certain Count Tattenbach translated Jingo into the most elegant Prussian, by remarking that Germany didn't want to fight, but that if she did she would squash her enemies like bugs<sup>1</sup>—but nobody was perturbed, and the Conference ended in a patched-up settlement by which France was supposed to have scored, and the Entente to have been proportionately strengthened.

It mattered little to anybody, and was probably highly agreeable to France, that the settlement was about as effective as an attempt to stop a leak with brown paper. The Sultan's authority was left nominally intact, but he was to be "assisted" by a Franco-Spanish police force under a Swiss chief. And if *that* did not succeed in stopping the distressing incidents that were the fruit of Moorish anarchy . . . why then, the civilizing power of France might find itself *compelled* to act, though no doubt with exemplary regret.

Another consequence followed by the rules of the international skin game. For when one player has been scored off under any circumstances, it is necessary for him to redress the balance at all costs in the near future, by scoring even more heavily somewhere else and so, if not *ad infinitum*, at least *ad Armageddon*. Now the Anglo-French Entente had registered a decided enough score over Germany to lead to the downfall of Holstein, who, as the Kaiser himself put it, had "constantly stirred up the poison against France." The old man, ruined and friendless, did not live to see the catastrophe that his blind cunning had prepared for his master, his country, and his species. If any sweetness came to his last embittered years, it was from the consciousness of patriotic virtue unrewarded.

The Morocco crisis was but the first of a series that, at intervals of two or three years, brought Europe

<sup>1</sup> *Lord Carnock*, by Harold Nicolson, p. 193.

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to edge of war, and finally over the edge. Even the intervals were spent in feverish preparation and manœuvring for position. Now that the nations were beginning to form up into two teams of approximately equal strength, each convinced of its mortal peril from the other, it became more and more plain that national egotism was hurrying fast to its logical conclusion in general suicide. It was a conclusion that hardly anybody, except the hardened professionals who wanted to play their war game with real bullets, could envisage without a shudder. And yet, though few willed the end, hardly any failed to will the means, and the competition of grab and chicane was pursued without the least regard for justice, principle, or common prudence. Civilization was tragically failing to control its own destinies.

The next move in the game was the natural sequel to the testing of the Dual Entente in this business of Morocco. England had already come within measurable distance of war in her support of France ; it was evident that if that support was to be continued, she would have to be prepared at any moment to unsheathe the sword on behalf of her as yet uncovenanted partner. What could be more foolish than to leave all the arrangements for so momentous a contingency to be improvised after war had actually broken out ? Every soldier realized that the endeavour of a Germany steeped in the tradition of Clausewitz and Moltke would be to fall on her nearest adversary, with annihilating violence, in the first weeks of the war. . Of what service could the small English army be, thrown into action without a plan, and with all those complicated staff arrangements, so essential to co-operation between allies and to the maintenance of an expeditionary force even on friendly soil, left to be thought out, as it were, between the saddle and the ground ?

But the Liberal Government was sincerely anxious

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for peace, and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, who more than any of his colleagues represented the spirit of old-fashioned Liberalism, was determined not to be drawn into any line of conduct that might be taken to imply so much as an honourable understanding to regard the Entente in the light of an alliance. All French overtures for the formal conclusion of such an alliance were courteously set aside, and down to the very outbreak of the War, Sir Edward Grey made it clear that his country retained her entire freedom of choice between peace and war. But if she were incapable of waging war effectively, could her choice be described as free? And what statesman, of Grey's calibre, would dare risk the guilt of sending an army to disaster that timely forethought might have averted?

Sir Edward Grey took just such action as might have been expected of him. While making it as clear as he could that England was in no way committed to come to the aid of France, he nevertheless was prepared to authorize the framing of joint plans of action between their respective military and naval authorities, as well as those of England and Belgium, in view of such a possibility. But what seems almost incredible—this most fateful decision was not even communicated to the general body of the Cabinet, some of whose members would no doubt have honoured their pacifist principles to the extent of raising difficulties. It is doubtful, indeed, whether Sir Edward himself realized the full significance of the new departure. For once having got to the point of framing joint plans of campaign, it would be almost impossible for England—without laying herself open to a charge of the blackest treachery—to leave the French and Belgians to fight it out alone against Germany.

Lord Grey has himself put on record his opinion, or instinctive feeling, in these early days of office,

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“ that if Germany forced war on France in order to destroy the Anglo-French Agreement, we ought to go to the help of France. We should be isolated and discredited if we stood aside ; hated by those whom we had refused to help, and despised by others. I thought, too, that when the time came, if it ever did come, when Germany attacked France, public opinion here would be so moved that Britain would intervene on the side of France.” <sup>1</sup>

It is true that he goes to qualify this statement by saying that Britain would not help France if she appeared aggressive. But a similar qualification could have been made even of the Dual and Triple Alliances. It is evident that the Foreign Minister believed in his heart of hearts that his country's honour and interests demanded that she should act, should the occasion arise, as if a precisely similar alliance had been actually concluded between England and France, and that though he was incapable of plotting to commit her to such action, he was perhaps not as sensitive as he might otherwise have been to the psychological necessity that followed from authorizing the soldiers to work out plans on an assumption of comradeship.

These staff conversations had another effect only less momentous than that of making it a moral impossibility for England to keep out of the next Franco-German War. For in course of time, they committed her to wage war in a manner foreign to her historical traditions, and to apply her military power without due regard to the circumstances of her geographical position. It was almost inevitable that once the two staffs entered into partnership, the greater should draw the less, and the French military chiefs could think of no other rôle for the British Army than that of an auxiliary to their own on what afterwards came to be known as the Western Front. It is significant that the first rumours of England's support to France contemplated the use of her regular army as an entirely independent force, availing itself to the fullest extent

<sup>1</sup> *Twenty-five Years*, Vol. I, p. 77.

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of that freedom of action which, as Lord Bacon long ago divined, is conferred by sea power. Sir John Fisher who, despite the fact of his uniform being blue and not red, had incomparably the greatest *flair* for grand strategy of anyone in the two services, to the end of his life was faithful to this ideal. But the French commanders knew exactly what they wanted, and strategical theory was not the strong suit of the British Army. When at last England was finally committed to the rôle that was to annihilate the flower of her manhood in the mud of Flanders and Picardy is not easy to determine, but it appears certain that by the time of the Agadir crisis, in 1911, the place of her expeditionary force on the left wing of the French Army had been definitely determined, and thenceforward the star of Wilson, the evil genius of the British Army and loyal backer of the French Staff, was in the ascendant.

Now that the Entente with France had taken on a definitely militant and anti-German complexion, the advantages of an understanding between England and France's partner in the Dual Alliance were too obvious to be overlooked. The new Germanophobia had outdated the Russophobia that had obsessed the English mind since the Berlin Treaty. One effect of the free hand that England had given to Japan for her attack upon Russia, had been to dispel for an indefinite period any prospect of a Russian invasion of India—and by the terms of the renewed alliance, Japan was pledged to come to England's aid in such a contingency. It remained only to remove, by a similar agreement to that with France, all causes of friction in the countries adjacent to India, before the Dual Entente could be expanded into the Triple.

But even in the ultra-Machiavellian conditions of pre-War diplomacy, partnership with Tsarist despotism was an enormous pill for a Liberal Parliament to swallow. Thanks to the fact of England having

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backed the cause of the Japanese in the recent war, and the whole of the press propaganda having been directed to the denigration of Russia, the public was kept fully informed of the more sensational atrocities perpetrated in that unhappy country, and the iniquities of its Government lost nothing in the telling. Not that exaggeration was needful, or even possible, for the state of that nightmare court was beyond the resources of journalism to depict—it would have needed some chronicler of witches' sabbaths to do it justice. The very name of Grand Duke was associated, in the public mind, with everything that was evil—when a popular burlesque wanted to suggest something incredibly absurd, it cited an imaginary defence of these dignitaries. It was true that the Tsar had been forced to allow a Duma, or Parliament, to assemble, though he took the first opportunity of dissolving it—which happened to be one of the least blameable acts of his reign. But to the British Liberal, Parliaments were Parliaments, and correspondingly sacred, and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman came out with the blazing but calculated indiscretion: "*La Duma est morte! Vive la Duma!*" This, from the English Premier, did not constitute a hopeful augury for an entente with Tsardom.

But Nationalism makes strange bedfellows, and it was so obviously the correct move in the international skin game for England and Russia to come together, that both sides were prepared to swallow a good deal. England was fortunate enough to have at St. Petersburg perhaps the ablest of a very able team of professional diplomatists, Sir Arthur Nicolson, who had already, with brilliant success, represented his country at the Algeiras Conference. With infinite tact and patience, Sir Arthur went to work with the Russian Foreign Minister, Isvolsky, and step by step a triple bargain concerning Tibet, Afghanistan and Persia—one far harder to conclude than that with France in

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1904—was hammered out between them. In 1907 the terms of this great settlement of the Middle East were communicated to the world. It was a masterpiece of diplomatic compromise, and King Edward's glowing appreciation of "my dear Nicolson" was not ill-deserved. Even Germany could offer no open objection to an arrangement so ostensibly pacific.

But what of the three Oriental peoples immediately concerned? For Tibet and Afghanistan, to whom was assigned the comfortable part of buffer states, the arrangement no doubt signified a blessed freedom from European interference. It was otherwise with the ancient kingdom of Persia, which had owed such freedom as she had hitherto enjoyed to her success in playing off England and Russia against each other, and now found herself partitioned into three zones, or spheres of influence, the northern, including the capital, being assigned to Russia, a corner in the south-east, selected with an eye to military security, going to England, and a neutral zone being left between. The strict independence and integrity of Persia was, of course, formally guaranteed. The interpretation placed upon the bargain by Russia was delightfully simple. She was now free to fasten upon Northern Persia as she had wished to fasten upon Korea, and subject it to the process euphemistically known as civilization.

The Russian authorities, from the Grand Dukes downwards, were not the men to do this sort of thing by halves. They rightly interpreted the new agreement as an implied promise from Sir Edward Grey to turn a Nelson eye to any proceedings whatever that Russia might see fit to take in her allotted sphere.

It happened that the Persians themselves, having got rid of a tyrannical Shah, in 1909, embarked upon a pathetic effort to set their house in order upon constitutional lines. This, of course, was a thing that the Russians could no more tolerate than Gilbert's



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Father Paul could allow the reformation of a bandit from the absolution of whose crimes no small part of his priestly income was derived. Russian troops were called in—according to the customary formula of civilization—for the protection of their nationals, and showed every disposition to stay put. Sir Edward Grey, like the good Liberal he was, entered a formal protest, and was answered by whatever is the diplomatic equivalent of a wink. Hardly had the new Government got into the saddle, than the old deposed tyrant reappeared on the scene, having passed through Russia and been provided with mineral-water cases containing munitions. A British Colonel, who proposed to reorganize the gendarmerie, was got rid of by Russian influence, and a similar fate overtook Mr. Morgan Schuster,<sup>1</sup> an American, who, as financial adviser to the Government, appeared capable of evolving order out of the chaos of Persian finances. Finally, in 1912, the great centre of pilgrimage, and the most sacred shrine in all Persia, that of Iman Riza, at Meshed, was bombarded, with a great slaughter of innocent people, a Russian consul-general having employed an *agent-provocateur* to make speeches of a sufficiently inflammatory nature to justify the calling in of the grey uniforms. To quote the words of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*,

“The outrage excited intense feeling in Persia and, to a lesser degree, throughout the Moslem world. It demonstrated beyond all doubt the sinister policy of Russia, and was the chief cause of the hatred with which the Northern power was regarded. In

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<sup>1</sup> “His departure was a loss . . .” says Lord Grey, “his aims were admirable and just, but he had not realized that Russian interference in North Persia could only be ousted by force; that Britain was not prepared to embark on a great European war for that purpose, that Britain was the only country that had any interest in seeing Russia restrained” (op. cit., Vol. I, p. 169). Whether Britain would have been likely to stultify her own policy by thwarting that of a prospective ally, Lord Grey refrains from saying.

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England the bombardment passed almost unnoticed, as it occurred simultaneously with the disaster to the *Titanic*, which entirely absorbed public attention.”<sup>1</sup>

By this time, the civilizing activities of England's new partner had succeeded in reducing Persia to a highly desirable state of anarchy. But a more sympathetic attitude to Russia had come to prevail than during the Japanese War. The personality of the Tsar served as an agreeable contrast to that of the Kaiser, and even the Grand Dukes no longer figured in the newspaper pillory. The Russian Entente bade fair to be an even more successful stroke of British policy than the Japanese alliance, and the man in the street, who was told nothing about the civilizing of Persia and Korea, even if he knew where either of them were, charitably assumed that his new friends had excellent reasons for such measures as they might find themselves constrained to adopt. It is only fair to add that Sir Edward Grey was exemplary in his disapproval. To use his own words: “Incidents frequently occurred in Persia of which we were bound to complain. My remonstrances were sometimes strong and the Russian Foreign Minister would get restive.”<sup>2</sup> But that wily Muscovite was well aware that raised forefingers break no bones, and Russian policy kept the even tenor of its way.

There is a Victorian parody of some romantic pastoral that runs :

No flocks that range the forest free  
To slaughter I condemn,  
The butchers kill the sheep for me,  
I buy the meat from them.

After all, the White Man's Burden was no Russian monopoly. In June, 1906, a particularly horrible incident occurred at the village of Denshawai, in the Nile delta. Some British officers of the Occupation

<sup>1</sup> 12th edition, new vols., art. *Persia*.

<sup>2</sup> op. cit., Vol. I, p. 168.

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were amusing themselves by shooting pigeons belonging to the villagers—no doubt with the permission of the head man, who may have been afraid to refuse it, or have pocketed the backsheesh for himself. The villagers, who had been subjected to the same treatment before, tried to prevent it by force, and in the scuffle a gun went off and wounded the wife of one of them. The officers were then subjected to a considerable amount of rough usage, and one of them, who ran off to get help for the others, died of sunstroke. The villagers concerned, some of whom were said to be known bad characters, were quickly brought to justice, or at any rate to vengeance. This took the form of four sentences of death by hanging, eight of torture by flogging, and various others of imprisonment ranging from life to one year. The killing and torturing were done in sight of the victims' homes, to the accompaniment of a dismal wailing from their womenfolk, and lasted altogether some two hours. Despite the fact that the British representative in Egypt, Lord Cromer, described these proceedings as "just and necessary," some indignation was aroused when the report of them reached England, and that pioneer of Imperialism, Sir Charles Dilke, was even moved to remark that if England proposed to strike terror by reports of executions and horrible floggings, she might as well withdraw from Egypt. But Sir Edward Grey was, and remained, adamant, and talked ominously about the increase of fanatical feeling in Egypt and of the "other measures, unconstitutional measures which we should be bound to take in an emergency, but which the House would regret,"<sup>1</sup> if the authority of the Egyptian Government were weakened. *Punch* appropriately closed the incident by a stately cartoon entitled *The Grey Knight Rides On*. And so, by the Grey Knight's leave, did the White Tsar.

<sup>1</sup> *Annual Register*, 1906, p. 176.

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The year after the conclusion of the Anglo-Russian agreement, the services of Edward VII were enlisted in the task of cementing the friendship, and a meeting of Royal Yachts was arranged at the Esthonian Port of Reval, for, like his nephew the Kaiser, the King had no mind to risk the perils of a landing on Russian soil. His tact was as conspicuous as ever, and after a thorough coaching from Nicolson, he astonished the Tsar and his court by his intimate knowledge of Russian affairs. The episode did not end here, for the Labour Party resented the King's advances to Russia as outspokenly as the Commons of the early seventeenth century had resented similar advances to Spain, and one of them, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, went so far as to write down the Tsar a common murderer. The King's naturally irritable temper for once got the better of his discretion, and selecting Keir Hardie and Mr. Arthur Ponsonby, the most advanced members, respectively, of the Labour and Liberal Parties, together with a solitary Communist, Victor Grayson, as the ringleaders, he inflicted a public snub on all three by refusing them invitations to a royal garden-party. As might have been anticipated, the whole Labour Party at once took up the challenge and downed teacups in portentous sympathy; the press, unable to resist so obvious a scoop, magnified the incident to the dimensions, almost, of a constitutional crisis; until His Majesty, with a return to his customary good sense, ended it by what amounted to a dignified surrender.

Thus did the demands of high policy prevail over sentiment; the Grey Knight rode on; the Dual was expanded into the Triple Entente. It was a strange, composite Ormuz that was arising to withstand the Teutonic Ahriman.

### CHAPTER III

#### WE WANT EIGHT!

Before 1909 the game between parties had been singularly little affected by that between nations. The ordinary Englishman would get less excited over a crisis that might at any moment plunge his country into a life and death struggle, than over the trivialities of the Schools controversy, or the more decided thrills of Cup Ties and Test Matches. He was content to trust Sir Edward Grey as he had trusted Lord Lansdowne, and to take the chances of war as he did those of an influenza epidemic or a wet summer. Unlike his neighbour in France, whose nerves the menace of invasion kept continually on the stretch, the Englishman did not visualize war as affecting him vitally. The soldiers would do whatever fighting there was to be done, and the fleet would keep him and his safe from anything more serious than extra taxation—the fleet, upon whose unconquerable might reposed the fabric of his complacency.

But once let it be borne in on him that that supremacy was challenged, and there was no bottom to the depth of his alarm. It was the one matter of high policy on which he could not cheerfully resign his judgment to that of his experts. He must be satisfied for himself that he was in no danger of finding his home defenceless to invasion, or the food on which he depended no longer arriving from overseas. And for some years now the double suspicion had been germinating in his mind, fostered by an intensive newspaper propaganda, firstly, that British naval supremacy was being challenged with a greater chance

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of success than at any time in modern history, and secondly, that his own Government was dangerously and even criminally neglecting its first duty of keeping the strength of the fleet above safety level.

The problem, as the ordinary man now conceived of it, had the advantage that it could be stated in very simple terms, in fact, in one word—Dreadnoughts. He realized clearly that the advent of this new type of ship gave the Germans a unique opportunity of starting the competition again, with no greater handicaps than the slight start that Fisher's astuteness and energy in the construction of the original *Dreadnought* had conferred upon England. In quite a few years, Dreadnoughts would be the only ships to count in a fleet action, and accordingly a working test of naval supremacy would be by number of Dreadnoughts. A naval officer of course would have imported many other factors into the calculation, but the Dreadnought test was one that could easily be applied and understood, and after all the most essential thing, in the opinion even of seamen, was a winning superiority in big ships.

The ordinary man knew that the Admiralty, in the last year of Unionist administration, had stipulated for the laying down of four big ships in each annual programme of construction, and he was naturally inclined to accept this Cawdor Programme as the minimum of security. But now another Government had come in that seemed determined, at all costs, to cut down the fleet in the interests of economy. No sooner was it in the saddle than it began to tamper with the Cawdor Programme in the hope that if England set the example of slackening competition, Germany would follow. In 1906 the four new ships became three. The Germans showed every sign of speeding up rather than slackening. In 1907 there was some hope of the Second Peace Conference at The Hague accomplishing some limitation of arma-

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ments, and the four again became three. Nothing whatever was done towards limiting armaments at The Hague, for the sufficient reason that the Germans would not hear of it, and yet, so far from arrears being made up in 1908, only two Dreadnoughts were provided instead of four, thus, in three years, leaving England short, by a third, of the dozen Dreadnoughts that ought, according to the Cawdor scheme, to have been provided. And so far from any answering disposition being apparent to slacken the German rate of construction, both in 1906 and 1908 provision was made for increasing it.

There has never come to light the least evidence to justify the suspicion, widely entertained at the time and even now not entirely discredited, that the German fleet was being built with the deliberate purpose of launching an attack on England at some selected moment. Admiral von Tirpitz, that master-builder of German sea-power, does not appear to have been inspired by any special antipathy to England, still less to have cherished designs like those of Fisher, for "Copenhagening" the rival fleet. His standpoint was throughout that of a professional sailor determined to realize a certain ideal of strength and efficiency and to endow the Fatherland in course of time, and by perfectly straightforward methods, with five squadrons, each consisting of eight Dreadnoughts. If England chose to build eight, or even ten squadrons, that was her affair. The futility of two great powers throwing their resources with both hands into the sea, in order to be eight to five in squadrons instead of battleships, was not likely to appeal to the professional mind, that tends to value big battalions and big ships for their own sakes—and what admiral is there who does not feel grander in command of a fleet than of a solitary squadron? But, as Professor Brandenburg puts it, "the argument that every country shall build as many ships as it needs for its

requirements, without heeding what others do, betrays . . . an almost incredible confusion of thought for such a vital matter.”<sup>1</sup>

As for the Kaiser, his reactions to the idea of sea power were even more than characteristically neurotic. Since the old days of his visits to Cowes, he had never wavered in his admiration for that historic fleet whose admiral's uniform he was so proud to wear. His opinion of Treitschke's teaching that England, standing in the way of Germany's expansion, must be defeated on sea, is sufficiently indicated by one of his notes, never intended for the public eye, “We shall never be so stupid. It would be Hari-kiri!”<sup>2</sup> So wedded was he to this idea of England's naval invincibility, that in the critical opening phase of the War, he used his authority as Supreme War-lord to keep his High Seas Fleet virtually immobilized out of harm's way. It was just this consciousness of inferiority on his beloved sea that irritated the Kaiser almost to madness. The least attempt to broach the subject of an Anglo-German agreement to fix the proportions of their respective fleets was enough to make him see red. Were these English, with their insufferable superiority, to say to his Germany—“Thus far shalt thou build and no further”? Were they to be judges of how great a fleet was commensurate with their dignity and interests?

To quote another of his marginal outbursts: “The German fleet is built against nobody, and so not against England. . . . The law will be carried out to the last tittle, whether the Britons like it or not; it is the same to us. If they want war, let them begin it.”<sup>3</sup>

Such being his state of mind, the best that could have been expected from the Kaiser was that he should

<sup>1</sup> *From Bismarck to the World War*, by E. Brandenburg, p. 272.

<sup>2</sup> *German Diplomatic Documents*, Vol. III, p. 282.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.



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have refrained from going out of his way to make a bad situation worse. But so confident was he of his own power to dominate any situation, and also so strong in his innocence of those diabolical plots which it was the habit of the Jingo press to accuse Germany of hatching, that he plunged into amateur diplomacy in order to allay the rapidly rising alarm that the growth of his fleet was causing in England. His first move, in the spring of 1908, was to dispatch a private letter to Lord Tweedmouth, First Lord of the British Admiralty, to the effect that Germany had no intention of challenging Britain's naval supremacy. Reports of this letter soon got about, and the worst possible interpretation was instantly put upon it—it was all part of a plot to prevent the English ship-building programme from being expanded; the Liberal statesman was almost a traitor to have respected such a confidence.

In the same autumn, the Kaiser followed up this indiscretion by one that put it entirely into the shade. He allowed an interview with him to be published in the *Daily Telegraph*, which took the form of one of those neurotic monologues which he generally reserved for the decent privacy of State Documents.

"You English are mad, mad, mad as March hares. . . . What can I do more than I have done? . . . To be for ever misjudged, to have my repeated offers of friendship weighed and scrutinized with jealous, mistrustful eyes, taxes my patience severely. I have said time after time that I am the friend of England, and your press, or at least a considerable section of it, bids the people of England refuse my proffered hand, and insinuates that the other holds a dagger. How can I convince a nation against its will? . . . I strive without ceasing to improve relations, and you retort that I am your arch-enemy. You make it very hard for me."

There was a lot more in the same strain, about the Kaiser's friendly attitude during the Boer War, about the wonderful plan of campaign that he had forced on the unwilling notice of the then Prince of Wales,

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and references to the peril to the white race from England's Japanese allies—a favourite obsession of the Kaiser's, and whose inconsistency he could never see with his avowed intention of standing forth as the champion of Islam in arms.

It is proof of the extraordinary suspicion that pervaded the international atmosphere at this time, that this furiously sincere outburst was fastened on by the anti-German press as proof positive of the Kaiser's plot to lull England into a false sense of security, and that he should have been assailed with every conceivable form of ridicule and abuse. The effect on the German nationalist press was equally unfortunate, but for the precisely opposite reason that the interview evinced too great a disposition to truckle to the susceptibilities of a hated rival, and a first-class constitutional crisis was the result, that had the effect of putting a definite period to the Kaiser's experiments in conducting foreign policy behind the back of his ministers. The effect on his hypersensitive nature was that of a humiliating snub, and on questions of naval policy he became more intractable and explosive than ever. But his mood was sane and reasonable compared with the panic-stricken hatred and suspicion with which the press on both sides of the North Sea had succeeded in inoculating their respective publics. The repeated efforts that were made by statesmen like Bethmann Hollweg and Haldane, by financiers like Cassel and Ballin, by professional diplomatists like Hardinge, to find some way out of the mad competition in naval shipbuilding, were doomed to break down helplessly against the madness of those whom the gods wished to destroy.

Early in 1909, when the time approached for the naval estimates to be presented, the Man in the Street, who had hitherto taken the Government's default on the Cawdor Programme with a certain indifference, was worked up into a state of alarm bordering on

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panic. Nor can we dismiss that alarm as merely the result of a press-fed agitation, for it was rightly argued that without an unprecedented effort of shipbuilding, and therefore of taxation, the margin of British superiority over Germany might in a short time be reduced below safety level, and—in certain conceivable circumstances—vanish altogether. Moreover, despite the Kaiser's assurances that the official programme of construction would not be exceeded, no one conversant with the morality of modern Powers, and with the Prussian record of unscrupulousness, could be quite certain that such an attempt would not be made to steal a march on Britain, though it is only fair to say that nothing of the sort actually occurred.

It was easy to talk of keeping a calm head and trusting those in authority to provide for the safety of the country. But were they to be trusted? It was notorious that most of the Government's supporters were definitely pledged to reduce expenditure on the services; it was known that the present crisis was largely the result of its refusal to build up to the steady four a year of the Cawdor Programme. It was now simply a question of whether the ministers would take their political life in their hands, and make up for arrears by laying down not only the four keels due in the present year, but those other four that in accordance with their pledges and principles they had refused to lay down in previous years.

Looking back after the lapse of nearly a generation, one can see that not only the national dignity, but the cause of peace, would have been better served by lifting the question out of the field of party controversy, and adopting an impersonal attitude. England, that is to say, could have fixed a definite ratio of superiority as necessary to her safety, and made it clear that the maintenance of that ratio was a pure matter of technical calculation. It would have been

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far better to have decided, once for all, that three British keels should follow every German two, as surely as night follows day, than first to have encouraged the notion that there was a real chance of the pace of construction proving too killing, and then to have made up the leeway by dint of a hair-raising orgie of anti-German and anti-Government propaganda.

Most of this propaganda, which survived the original Dreadnought scare and raged on furiously right up to the outbreak of the War, was quite irrelevant to the real danger, and was based on the assumption that the Germans, without even troubling to get command of the sea, were meditating a piece of sensational villainy, by secretly assembling, and transporting to some selected spot on the East Coast, a devoted force of 70,000 men, who, having been bundled ashore in an incredibly short space of time, would then proceed to snap their fingers at the British fleet, when it duly turned up just in time to see the last Pomeranian grenadier goose-stepping through the turnstile of Clacton Pier. Various ways were suggested to the presumably interested Germans of accomplishing this feat, one of them being the assembly of a secret armada somewhere off the Frisian coast, another, their taking advantage of a fog of record intensity, of which the supreme command had doubtless been apprised for months in advance, and which in no way interfered with the problem of marine transportation. This last was the method adopted in a play which scored a tremendous success, *The Englishman's Home*, in which the invaders, whose leader talked in significantly guttural accents, were contrasted, entirely to their own advantage, with the ridiculous Territorials and contemptible civilians who stood in their path.

The Admiralty was well aware of the technical impossibility of any such melodramatic coup, and

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Fisher, who, for all his ruthless nationalism, was singularly clear-headed, treated it with open ridicule, assuring the civilians that they could sleep quietly in their beds—for which blasphemy he too was numbered by the more intransigent Germanophobes among the traitors. But an invasion was a necessary postulate for a propaganda of conscription—only, as that word was unpopular, it was called National Service—to which even the veteran Lord Roberts lent his authority. It is possible that he may, in his heart, have realized the real purpose for which a conscript army might be required, which was that of fighting Germany on the Continent, a course to which the Staff conversations were more and more deeply committing England. But the mere suggestion of such a thing would, at this time, have aroused such indignation in the country, that no one, not even a popular hero, could have mooted it with the least chance of obtaining a hearing. So the invasion, and the 70,000, had to be worked for all they were worth.

Lord Tweedmouth's mind having given way under the strain of office, Mr. Reginald McKenna, who had succeeded Mr. Birrell as Minister of Education, was transferred to the Admiralty, and it was not long before his Sea Lords had convinced him of the gravity of the crisis. He had no easy task in persuading the Cabinet of the necessity for Dreadnought building on such an heroic scale as not even a Unionist Government had envisaged. But the evil of unbalancing a Budget was less than that of the resignation of the whole Board of Admiralty, and a compromise was arranged that gave Mr. McKenna and his Sea Lords the substance of what they wanted while gilding the pill to recalcitrant ministers and their followers in the House. It amounted to this—four of the eight required battleships were provided for in the programme, but the Government reserved the right to lay down four more should they deem it necessary.

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In the atmosphere of alarm that already pervaded the country, this was about the most unfortunate step that could have been taken. It had all the appearance of a dishonest subterfuge—that the extra four were provided for at all was taken for proof that ministers could no longer deny their necessity, that they were provided for contingently indicated that a way was being left open for shuffling out of any unpleasant responsibility at the price of leaving the country naked to her enemies.

The Opposition, which was sincerely convinced of the urgency of the crisis, had also an obvious chance of discrediting the Government, and the press had one of the most sale-stimulating cries that had offered itself since the golden days of the Boer Ultimatum and Black Week. The great armament firms, whose interest in stimulating construction was obvious, naturally tended, in England as in other countries, to use all the pull their resources conferred on them to help on the good work of making patriotic flesh creep. A perfect auction commenced of estimates of German Dreadnought strength in a few years' time—even Mr. Balfour bid as high as 25 for 1912. The feeling that the country was inevitably lost unless the contingent part of the programme was carried out crystallized itself into a slogan :

We want eight and we won't wait !

and this, which became the refrain of a Unionist song, played no small part in the return of the Opposition candidate, at a by-election at Croydon, by a greatly increased majority over that of 1906. The wildest language was used ; every effort was made to depict Germany as England's implacable enemy, and to engender a habit of regarding war between the two countries as something inevitable in a by no means remote future. The British public showed that it could panic in 1909 as wildly as it had mafficked in

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1900. Not till July did the Government yield to the inevitable and promise the contingent four.

It is the disadvantage of the historian that he has to follow the facts without yielding to his sense of artistic necessity. The story certainly demands that the contingent four should have turned out to be grossly in excess of the nation's requirements. But it is by no means certain that the panic-mongers were wrong in the substance of their demand, even though the figures quoted in its support are now seen to have been wildly exaggerated. For those Englishmen who realize how barely adequate was the fleet under Admiral Jellicoe's command, during the early months of the War, to accomplish its critical task of holding the entrances to the North Sea, even with the help of the Kaiser's providential inertia, can best judge what would have been his chances, and those of the Entente, had the strength of that fleet been diminished to the extent of four, or even fewer, Dreadnoughts.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE BUDGET AND THE VETO

The crisis about the navy had the effect of precipitating another that, if not more important, was at least more sensational. For the building of great ships is among the most expensive of luxuries, and the financial year in which the eight Dreadnoughts were to be laid down was also the first in which the full expense of Old Age Pensions would have to be met. This, altogether, would involve the raising of an extra sixteen millions over and above the yield of existing taxation, a mere trifle compared with the astronomical figures of post-War finance, but enough to appal the stoutest-hearted Chancellor of the Edwardian Age. The hearts of ministers must have sunk within them when they found themselves faced with this most unpopular of all tasks. Few of them could have dreamed that their very necessity was destined to be turned to glorious gain, and to provide the means of settling their long overdue account with the Tory Upper Chamber.

By 1909 the Ministry had changed considerably in personnel and distribution of offices since its formation in 1905. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman had died in the previous year, and the Cabinet had ceased to be dominated by that tradition of old-fashioned Liberalism of which he was one of the last whole-hearted devotees. His successor was a Yorkshire barrister, Mr. Asquith, a man of far more distinguished talents, but without that instinctive faith in the magic of the Liberal prescription that had inspired C.B. in dealing with the South African problem, and had



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enabled him, during the brief period of his Premiership, to earn the respect—not untinged by affection—of his colleagues and the nation at large. Faith was hardly the quality anyone would have postulated of Asquith. His mind had something more than the dryness that pervades the atmosphere of the courts. He shared the eighteenth-century standpoint that regarded “enthusiasm” as a term of disparagement. He had all the unemotional virtues; he was incapable of petty intrigue, and one of those all too rare politicians of whom it could be said, at the end of a long career, “he nothing common did nor mean.” But he was not of the stuff of which the great believers and crusaders are made. He held a brief for his party, which he could plead with the majesty of a Cicero, but with a conciseness of statement more in the Tacitean vein. And like the perfect advocate he was, he was capable of expressing himself in chiselled English, and yet giving away nothing more than he had intended, even if this involved leaving his audience no wiser than before. It was not altogether by accident that popular tradition came to associate Mr. Asquith’s name with the phrase “Wait and see!” He was in his dry, as Gladstone had been in his expansive, and Balfour was in his somewhat casuistical way, what is known as a great Parliamentarian. How far this phrase may be taken as implying great statesmanship is a matter concerning which every man must be free to form his own opinion.

While Mr. Asquith imparted a conservative and stabilizing force to his ministry, a dynamic influence, not less potent, emanated from a personality in almost every respect the direct opposite of his own, that of his newly promoted Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Lloyd George. So far from eschewing emotion, this solicitor from Wales specialized in it, and possessed an unrivalled faculty of stimulating it in others. He will probably live in history as among the greatest

passion-compelling orators of all time. To understand his career, it is necessary to consider its historical background of Welsh Nonconformity. The Methodist revival of the eighteenth century had exercised a profound effect upon English life, but Welsh life it had positively revolutionized. For generations, now, the whole life of a typical Welsh parish had been centred in the little Chapel, that had no form nor comeliness, and whose ministers were usually plain working men, appointed by a poor and intensely democratic congregation. Here the lack of colour and ritual was more than compensated for by an oratorical exuberance of successive generations of preachers, who, says Mr. Watkin Davies, in his invaluable account of his native Wales, "brought pulpit oratory to a point that has never been surpassed, even if it has been equalled, by any nation before or since."<sup>1</sup>

Hitherto, except when some revivalist like Evan Roberts had caused a nine days' wonder, nobody outside Wales had been greatly affected by what went on within the walls of these obscure Bethels. There is no product of the human imagination so perishable as oratory, and few remember the names of John Jones, John Elias, and Owen Thomas. But now, here was a preacher capable of making the House of Commons his chapel, and, in course of time, the whole nation, from John o' Groats to Land's End, his congregation. It was as if the mountains of his native land had been in labour, ever since the first earthquake shock of Wesley's evangel, to give birth to this wizard. His fellow-countrymen were as tinder to the fire of his eloquence, and to the English it was a new and proportionately stimulating phenomenon. It was reinforced by a reckless and defiant courage, that laughed at odds and rose with disaster. There was a quality about this defiance that soon impressed itself on the popular imagination, and caused it to

<sup>1</sup> *Wales*, by W. Watkin Davies, p. 216.

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he whispered, in clipped but horrified accents, that this little Welsh attorney was not quite the gentleman that even a Liberal Minister should be. For, indeed, he had imported into the decorous atmosphere of English politics not only the eloquence but the democracy of the tin chapel. That a Duke should turn as scarlet as his hunting coat and talk to a commoner as if he had just ridden over a hound, might be deplorable, and even provoke some Radical Ajax to defy the thunder—but that the commoner should snap his fingers in His Grace's face and even expand them into a snook, was something that not even the average English Labour Member would have thought in quite the best of taste.

There was another peculiarly Celtic quality by which the new Chancellor was distinguished, that consists in an almost complete lack of what the Romans called *gravitas*. The slow and tedious processes of collecting information, of balancing judgment, and giving its due weight to each of the factors in a complicated problem, that delayed the action of a Balfour, were never likely to cause a moment's hesitation to Mr. Lloyd George. With him to perceive was to feel, and to feel was to rush into action or to overflow in torrents of eloquence. A shrewd judge might have guessed that in fullness of time and under the stress of a great emergency, this man would be the adored ruler of a democratic electorate, when the philosophic Balfour had sunk into a back seat and the unemotional Asquith had been rudely pushed to the wall.

Such was the Chancellor who now had to face the situation created by the sixteen million deficit. For most politicians promotion to the Chancellorship under these circumstances would have seemed about as invidious as that of Uriah the Hittite to the forefront of the battle. But to Mr. Lloyd George's temperament, odds were only a stimulus. It was not

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his instinct to resign himself to making the best of a bad business. With native intuition he had divined one element in the situation that might provide him with the chance not only of getting the money, but also of counter-attacking, with decisive effect, the hitherto victorious Lords. He might have anticipated Foch's famous but apochryphal message by saying, "My coffers empty; the pendulum swinging; I attack with my Budget."

But there is one difference worth remarking—Foch's reported words concerned a life-and-death struggle with a national enemy whom it was his duty to hurl back at all costs and by any practicable means. Mr. Lloyd George was ostensibly trying to raise money for the King's service in the way that would cause least detriment to his subjects. Such a task does not involve attacking or defeating anybody, nor is a Budget normally regarded in the light of a bludgeon for the heads of His Majesty's Opposition. But it was not Mr. Lloyd George who had started the conversion of politics into the skin game. The Lords had been playing it, with the utmost skill and success, for the last three years. It would have taken a statesman of very different calibre from that of the fiery Welshman to have resisted the temptation to let this trump card in his hand

Fall like thunder on the prostrate ace

of the Lansdowne-Balfour partnership.

For there was one weak point in the otherwise impregnable position in which the Lords were entrenched across the path of Liberal legislation. They could throw out any ordinary Bill, but by a constitutional custom older than that which restrained the King from the use of his veto, they were bound to give free passage to a Finance Bill. Now upon finance the whole structure of modern society depended—it would be possible to revolutionize it by finance alone.

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Mr. Lloyd George was no revolutionary at heart, but he realized that he could embody in a Finance Bill measures more acutely distasteful to their Lordships than any of those they had so contemptuously thrown out in previous years, measures whose passing would put them to even greater annoyance and humiliation than they had succeeded in putting upon the Government. That was the least that could happen, but there was just a possibility that the Lords might lose their heads and their tempers to the extent of becoming revolutionaries themselves, and laying violent hands on the Budget. Then indeed they would be quitting the advantageous ground on which they had hitherto been careful to offer battle, and would have delivered themselves at last into the hands of their enemies.

Accordingly the Budget was designed so as to hit as hard as possible at the two interests with which the Tory cause was most closely identified. The landed interest was harried by increased death duties, duties on undeveloped land and minerals, a reversion duty on the termination of a lease, and a 20 per cent levy on the unearned increment of land, a concession to socialist theory destined to prove unworkable in practice. If it was necessary to hit the big landlord, it was still more important to irritate him, and this was effected by a minute and complicated questionnaire which the Chancellor likened to another Domesday Book, but which to the questionees was more reminiscent of the Holy Office. Mr. Lloyd George next proceeded to implement the threat already made by one of his colleagues, to avenge the defeat of the Licensing Bill by "swingeing duties" upon the Trade. And finally, by increasing the differentiation, already made by Mr. Asquith, between income just earned and income derived from the investment of earned or inherited capital, and by imposing a supertax on incomes of over £5,000, the Budget was given a

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mildly socialistic complexion that would put the Lords, if they resisted it, in the light of rich men selfishly defending the privileges of "capital."

Never was net spread with such ostentation, and it might well have seemed inconceivable that the Peers, who had played their dangerous game, hitherto, with masterly discrimination, should now oblige their enemies by perpetrating what was nothing less than a constitutional outrage. But we have seen how the impunity of their proceedings had already caused their lordships to exhibit dangerous symptoms of *hubris*, or, as an undergraduate might have put it, to get above themselves. The penal taxation of whatever profits they still derived from their estates touched them on their most sensitive spot, and having, for the most part, thoroughly John Bullish heads beneath their coronets, they resented the tactics of this Welsh attorney as a deliberate hit below the belt. Old Lord Salisbury and the Duke of Devonshire, had they been alive, would never have allowed the emotions of their followers to get the better of their judgment, and would certainly have perceived that the waiting game was the winning game. But the lack of inhibition, so characteristic of an age of nerves, was as marked in peers as it was in emperors. From its first appearance, the Budget was assailed with an unrestrained violence that would make it very difficult, when the time came, to avoid proceeding to extremities.

This was to play right into Mr. Lloyd George's hands, and he was determined to exploit to the full the folly of his assailants. An admiring biographer has recorded how, when the Liberal Cabinet refused to believe that the Lords would go to the length of throwing out the Budget, "Mr. Lloyd George persisted in believing the contrary. 'They will throw it out all right!' he would always say cheerfully enough; and the only shadow that would pass over

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his face would come when someone would half convince him to the contrary.”<sup>1</sup>

The master-stroke was dealt when the Chancellor went down to address an audience of East-enders at Limehouse. He was greeted with tumultuous enthusiasm, and launched forth, whether by premeditation or by the orator's instinct for exploiting to the full the mood of his audience, into an appeal of a kind with which the audiences of Welsh revivals were sufficiently familiar, but which to English ears was something new and irresistible. Reading it even now, in cold print, it is hard not to be carried away by the fiery torrent of such invective as,

“The landlords . . . never deposited the coal in the earth. It was not they who planted those great granite rocks in Wales. Who laid the foundations of the mountains? Was it the landlord? And yet he, by some divine right, demands as his toll—for merely the right for men to risk their lives in hewing those rocks—eight millions a year!”

And so on, with a sustained splendour of imaginative imagery to the peroration,

“Why should I put burdens on the people? I am one of the children of the people. I was brought up amongst them. I know their trials; and God forbid that I should add one grain of trouble to the anxieties that they bear with such patience and fortitude. . . .”

It was no doubt magnificent, but Mr. Lloyd George's colleagues had hardly been prepared for this open incitement to the Have-nots to rise and mutiny against the Haves. However, for the immediate purpose of kindling enthusiasm against the Lords, it was undoubtedly effective—and the morrow could take thought for the things of itself. As for the Peers themselves and their Unionist allies, their fury knew no bounds of prudence. “Limehouse”

<sup>1</sup> *David Lloyd George*, by Harold Spender, p. 102.

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became a term of abuse on a political par with Billingsgate. The order of Dukes emerged from the obscurity which had long enveloped it, and some of its members distinguished themselves by a violence of language that out-Limehoused Limehouse. One noble sportsman even expressed a desire to throw the offending Chancellor to his pack of dog hounds. Another—north of the Tweed—instructed his agent to recoup him for the Budget by refusing a guinea to a football club. The delight of Mr. Lloyd George knew no bounds, and he threw himself with zest into the new sport of Duke-baiting. The aristocracy he compared to a cheese—the older it is the higher it gets. The Peers, whom cartoonists depicted and most city-dwellers visualized as those in the chorus of *Iolanthe*, stood, in this interchange, at the hopeless disadvantage of the important person in a temper.

It is doubtful whether the Chancellor's campaign had such a decisive influence on the electorate as was believed at the time. Such appeals as that of Limehouse have most effect in rousing the enthusiasm of electors who would in any case have cast their votes as far to the left as possible. The men in the middle, by whom the issue of elections is really determined, were as likely to be frightened towards the right as enthused for the left. Whatever points might be scored in the game between the Houses, it is probable that the real dominating factor of the situation had never ceased to be the stolid opposition of the Industrial North to anything savouring of Protection, and that if the Government had gone to the country at any time previously to 1910, the verdict would have been substantially the same as it was then.

The Tariff Reform group, that now supplied the driving force to the Unionist Caucus, was determined to link the fortunes of the party irrevocably to its propaganda. In this it was encouraged—as Disraeli had been in making his appeal to the country in 1880—



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by the results of a by-election in South London. A certain Mr. John Dumphreys, whose most notable characteristic was an enormous pair of what had once been known as Piccadilly weepers, leapt into sudden fame as Unionist and Tariff Reform candidate for Bermondsey. It was perhaps even more his whiskers than his principles that made him an ideal candidate to stunt, but the excitement worked up over the affair in the papers is hard to believe nowadays—one phrase that comes back to the memory, from the most intellectual of all the Sunday Papers, is “the Ithuriel spear of Jack’s common sense.” In spite of the fact that the vote against him was split, the success of Mr. Dumphreys in winning the seat was acclaimed as the beginning of a Tariff Reform landslide, and no doubt had its effect in hardening the Peers to put all to the touch. It is only necessary to add that Mr. Dumphreys’s career as M.P. barely outlasted the end of the year, and that in the General Election his return to his former obscurity passed almost unnoticed.

The Tariff Reformers felt themselves in a real dilemma, because the Budget was meant to demonstrate the possibility of raising money not only for national defence, but for a constructive policy of social reform without resort to import duties. If it were to pass without any openly disastrous consequences, it would be possible to argue that the main prop of the Protectionist case had been knocked away. Thus the purblind arrogance of men to whom politics were only an occasional interruption in a life-long devotion to fox, horse, and pheasant, was reinforced by the insistence of business men in a hurry, and the Peers proved as capable of being stampeded as any other mob. Lord Milner exhorted them to damn the consequences of rejection, and those who counselled prudence began to be despised much as if they were soldiers who funked going over the top. Lord Lansdowne and Mr. Balfour were certainly alive

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to the dangers of the situation, but they probably felt that it was better to put themselves at the head of the mob than to be trampled underfoot in the stampede.

The end came in November, when the Budget at last came up to the Lords, and it was known that the incredible had happened, and the Upper House had decided to violate a tradition that had held good since the days of the Merry Monarch. There was a debate that lasted six days, and a vote that represented quite a considerable whip up of coroneted deadheads, after which a couple of rockets were sent up under Liberal auspices in token of revolution, and the country settled itself down, amid less than the normal excitement, to the business of electioneering.

This election, like the last, was fought in January, and the result was far from flattering to the calculations of either side. Most of the county and residential constituencies, with a goodly proportion of the small boroughs, that had gone Liberal in 1906, swung back to their Unionist allegiance, but the great industrial districts, with the exception of the Birmingham area, remained steady to their Free Trade allegiance. The result was that Unionists and Liberals presented two solid phalanxes of almost equal numbers, and Labour receded by about a fifth from its 1906 high-watermark. This gave a British and Irish-Protestant majority of about 40 for the Budget, one that could be turned into a slightly greater majority against the vote of the Irish Catholics, who were known to disapprove violently of the Budget on account of its licence and spirit duties, and whose leader, Mr. Redmond, had denounced it as violating both the spirit and letter of the Act of Union. Thus if every member had voted in accordance with his expressed convictions, the Budget would have been thrown out on the assembly of the new Parliament, and the action of the Lords to that extent vindicated.

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Nobody, however, was simple enough to imagine that this would be the case.

For now the poison, injected by England into her own veins at the Act of Union, was about to produce its full effects. It was no longer a question of England governing Ireland, but of an Ireland, to which the very name of England was hateful, imposing her own terms upon her oppressor of past centuries. Her policy would be dictated not by any consideration for British interests, but by a cold calculation of her own. She did not care a Wood's Halfpenny whether the Lords had or had not violated the British Constitution—all she minded was that they stood in the way of her demands, and must therefore be rendered impotent. Her demand was for nothing less than Home Rule, a Home Rule that included the subjugation, by British law, and if necessary by British arms, of the Protestant community in the North-East.

That was the stark necessity that stared the British parties in the face. Only by one means could it be evaded, and that was for both to sink their differences in the face of a national emergency, and support an agreed plan for cutting the Irish cancer out of the British political system, without starting the whole tragedy again by reproducing the former relations of England and Ireland in those between Irish Catholic and Irish Protestant. But the rules of the skin game do not allow of such co-operation between the players. The Liberals were too much infuriated with the Lords to forgo the chance that now offered of getting even with them; the Lords were correspondingly embittered against Mr. Lloyd George and his Budget. If it were a choice between giving Mr. Redmond his pound of Protestant flesh, and leaving the Lords with their veto, the Government would not hesitate. And Mr. Redmond, if he had little of the ice and iron of Parnell in his nature, had imbibed enough of his

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master's teaching to see to it that there should be no other alternative.

It took more than a year and a half after the decision, or indecision, of January, 1910, to settle the business of the Lords. If the Budget was a clumsy and largely unworkable piece of finance, the Government's plan for dealing with the Second Chamber was an even more clumsy makeshift, that admittedly shirked what was really the most important element in the problem, that of substituting an efficient senate for a handful of Bishops, law-lords and retired dignitaries, reinforced by a scratch collection of sportsmen and business magnates,<sup>1</sup> most of whom made scarcely the least pretence of attending to their legislative duties. The fact is that the necessities of party warfare, when it has reached a certain stage of acuteness, leave no room for such luxuries as reform on scientific lines. Five-year Parliaments, Single Chamber finance, and an unreformed House of Lords with no moral authority but a legislative veto limited to roughly two years, formed no safeguard against revolution, since any chance majority of the Commons, that really meant business, could within three years of its election repeal this new Parliament Act by its own machinery and proceed to set up Single Chamber Government, or perpetuate any form of dictatorship it chose.<sup>2</sup> But failing such drastic measures, the Lords, with their powers now defined and unlimited by any unwritten convention, could hamper a Liberal Government to an extent that, before the rejection of the second Home Rule Bill, the Victorian Age had never dreamed of.

After the Irishmen had been induced, in expecta-

<sup>1</sup> It must be remembered that the handle to such a man's name, if achieved and not inherited, was more often than not a certificate of corruption.

<sup>2</sup> A menace not to be despised, if Continental precedent is anything to go by.

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tion of favours to come, to tilt the scales in favour of a Budget they abhorred, the rest of 1910 was employed in marking time. The crucial question was whether, and under what conditions, the Sovereign would consent, or could be constrained, to break the resistance of the Lords by a wholesale creation of Peers. The death of Edward VII, in the spring, imposed a temporary truce upon the party strife, and there was even talk of a solution by agreement. The new King, George V, was hardly on the throne before he began to put out feelers for a settlement. Partly as a result of an earnest letter of his to the Prime Minister, a joint conference of party leaders was arranged, and hopes were raised that were too bright to be realized. For after all the exaggerated rhetoric that had been used in the course of the controversy, any settlement whatever would have seemed a humiliating surrender to the rank and file of at least one faction, and probably both. So the Government persisted with its Bill, and the Lords formulated counter-proposals whose sincerity was not convincing.

In order that the King's hands might be strengthened, or forced, in applying the necessary coercion, the Government again appealed to the constituencies, and an obviously bored electorate decided in almost exactly the same sense as earlier in the year, and for probably the same reasons, since the Tariff Reform cause had not become any more popular in the industrial districts, and Mr. Balfour's last-minute offer to submit the question to a referendum was too obviously a tactical manœuvre of the kind that the plain man had learnt to expect from Mr. Balfour. No one who understood the mind of the average elector, and its incapacity for concentrating on more than one issue at a time, could have hoped to divert his thoughts to the Irish sequel of the proposed Parliament Act. Perhaps some forlorn hope of regaining its freedom from Mr. Redmond's dictation

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had weighed with the Government in challenging this second election.

The drama of the Parliament Act closed on a note of broad farce. Even the result of the December election could not convince some of the more reactionary peers that the game was up. These Diehards, as they were called, after a famous regiment, loudly proclaimed their intention of holding fast to their principles at all costs and all risks—though the Duke of Wellington, in a precisely similar situation, had counselled surrender, and the personal risks incurred by a tramp through the lobbies seemed hardly commensurable with those, for instance, of Albuera. The leaders of this band of heroes were Lord Halsbury, a pugnacious old lawyer now not far from his ninetieth year, and Lord Willoughby de Broke, who had hitherto been known as one of the sternest avengers of violated hen-roosts that had ever put spur to flank. It soon became known that unless the Act was passed, Mr. Asquith would advise the King to swamp the Unionist majority by a gigantic creation of Liberal peers—the list was actually made out—and that the King would consent. In that case not only Home Rule, but every other measure the Liberals liked to pass, would be rushed through without even the two years' suspension, and the prestige attaching to a title would be debased from the sublime to the ridiculous.

Nevertheless, the Diehards persisted—"and there," to quote the anonymous writer of the epilogue to his autobiography, "sat Willoughby de Broke as calm and collected as though waiting outside a covert for a fox to 'break'." Those among the Unionist leaders who retained some touch with reality, like Lord Lansdowne and Lord Curzon, tried hard to restrain their followers from committing *bara kiri*, but it was doubtful—even after Lord Morley had announced in the most solemn terms that peers could

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and would be created in case of necessity—whether they could hold back Lord Willoughby's field of sportsmen. It was now put about that any peer who "ratted" on the Bill was a mean, cowardly fellow, and the Unionist *Globe* went so far as to express a hope that no man would take any of them by the hand again, that their friends would disown them and their clubs expel them.<sup>1</sup>

Up to the very last the issue was doubtful. The Diehards made frantic efforts to whip up the last available peer—it is recorded that Lord Willoughby, having lured one noble duke down to the unaccustomed precincts of the House, endeavoured to keep him there by concealing his hat and coat, but all in vain, for his Grace bolted in what clothes he had left "and was never seen again."<sup>2</sup> The passage of the Bill was only secured when 37 Unionist peers, and 13 bishops headed by the Primate, actually voted for it, and even then the majority was a bare 17.

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith*, by J. H. Spender and Cyril Asquith, Vol. I, p. 327.

<sup>2</sup> *The Passing Years*, by Lord Willoughby de Broke, p. 303.





## BOOK IV PRE-WAR

### CHAPTER I SPEEDING UP

The death of Edward VII, on May 6th, 1910, was felt as a personal bereavement by millions of his subjects. They had taken to their hearts the genial man of the world, whose personality most of them had built up in their own minds out of material supplied by the newspapers and the thousand tongues of rumour. But Edward VII had come to stand for something more than the universal uncle he had been on his accession, he had to some extent taken his mother's place as a guarantee of safety, a royal mascot—nothing, it was felt, could go disastrously wrong while he was on the Throne. Throughout the Empire he was known as the Peacemaker, though in Germany he was believed to be a potentate of the utmost cunning and unscrupulousness, engaged in drawing a ring of hostile steel round the devoted Fatherland.

And yet his passing could not be said, like his mother's, to mark the end of an epoch. Edward was dead, but the Edwardian Age had four more years to run, and to run at ever-increasing speed, as if the last brake had now been removed from a car that was already speeding downhill. During these hectic and hustling years, the Throne was no longer occupied by a Sovereign whom even the press could convert into a representative figure of his age. It is true that the unobtrusive sailor who succeeded his father as

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George V had, as befitted his profession, travelled widely and taken an active interest in the development of the Empire, but it could not be said of him that he had the essentially modern *flair* for publicity. Edward VII, if he had not been a King, might have become hardly less famous as an actor, so innate was his capacity for getting the spirit of his part across the footlights. But the personality of George V grew into the affections of his subjects by a process more gradual, and, as it were, in spite of himself. An unsleeping consciousness of the responsibility attaching to his position—an inheritance perhaps from his Coburg grandfather—fostered a devotion to duty that was far from reflecting the easy spirit of the age, and on some occasions was an actual handicap to its possessor, as when, during the War, His Majesty set his example against the cult of pleasure as usual, rife in fashionable circles. With what wisdom and tact his duty was performed, and in how much less equivocal a sense than his father George V merited the title of Peacemaker, only time could disclose. It was through his initiative that the attempt was made to settle, by rational agreement, the quarrel between the two Houses, and during the Home Rule controversy, though in a position of extraordinary difficulty, he contrived to work tirelessly for peace without once taking sides with either of the contending factions or overstepping the limits of his authority as constitutional monarch.

One of his first acts displayed a courage not only moral but physical, for he, first of all English Sovereigns, went out to India to assume, with due Oriental pomp and magnificence, his authority of King Emperor, the occasion being used to transfer the capital from Job Charnock's comparatively modern settlement at the mouth of the Hoogly to the sacred and historic city of Delhi—and at the same time to repeal a partition of the Bengal Province by Lord Curzon,

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which, though defensible as an attempt to see fair play between Mohammedan and Hindu, was resented by the Hindu community as an intolerable grievance.

The term "Georgian" was, indeed, applied to a number of mostly young poets, whose work, collected in an anthology, was supposed to be peculiarly representative of the new age, but if the term could have been associated with any monarch, it was certainly not George V, though it may have recalled faint memories of the Prince Regent. Nobody, on the other hand, could have used the terms Edwardian and Victorian, without prime reference to the Sovereigns in question. It might have been said of George V that his was an essentially Victorian figure, and that the spirit of the great Queen would have rejoiced to know that a successor so entirely after her own heart now occupied her throne.

The press dared not, but rumour did its best to give the new King a publicity value in accordance with the last Georgian tradition. It was whispered that he had, like his great-great-uncle and namesake, contracted a secret marriage in his youth, and that Queen Victoria had forced him to substitute a royal for a morganatic consort. All were agreed that the unfortunate lady was the daughter of an Admiral, but at least three Admirals were cited in different versions, some bold romancers even going so far as to make the sinking of the flagship *Victoria* the picturesque device of an aggrieved parent for drowning the old Queen in effigy. Unfortunately a certain obscure Communist was imprudent enough to print a somewhat less lurid rendering, and was brought to book in a manner that rendered it impossible for the most hardened scandal-monger to humanize—in the post-Stracheyan manner—his Sovereign's biography. It is to be feared that the most loyal feeling aroused in many contemporary breasts by this vindication was that of regret for Edward VII. For the English

public displays a curious incapacity to tolerate blamelessness except in its female Sovereigns.

We must picture George V, then, during these first four years of his reign, as standing aloof, with a certain quiet dignity, from their increasing turmoils. On every side the pace of life was being speeded up, even in the most literal sense. By the end of Edward VII's reign, the motor-car was plainly effecting the conquest of the highway. The private car was now part of every rich man's establishment, though as yet its price made it a prohibitive luxury for all but a minority of the middle class. But for the adventurous youth of villadom, there was the motor-bicycle, a fearsome contrivance with a note reminiscent of a machine-gun barrage and prolific of smashes. Already the dignified broughams and victorias, the natty traps and dog-carts were beginning to disappear from the roads, and grooms and coachmen—unless they could turn their hands to the service of the internal-combustion engine—were finding it more and more difficult to get a living. A new type of servant had sprung into being, a man not in livery but in uniform, no longer racy of the stable but knowledgeable of the machine. In the London streets, the horse-bus drivers, a last link with the old coaching days, were ousted by silent mechanics, who no longer chatted with two or three favoured passengers, but sat in strained attention at their wheels, out of earshot. Another London institution that was being swept into limbo was the hansom cab, a somewhat alarming conveyance, whose horses seemed to be perpetually slipping down on the wooden pavements and whose drivers were apt to entertain notions on the subject of fares which they would expound with no lack of candour. But the new taxi-driver had not only his engine driven but his fare fixed by machinery, and even his reaction against the amount of his gratuity had something about it a trifle mechanical.

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A passion for breaking records was a natural accompaniment of the motor age. The new type of popular hero was he who, despising life, could succeed in propelling some kind of machine faster than anybody else had done. A law had been passed restricting the speed of motors to 20 miles an hour, but nobody, not even the magistrate on his way to fine his fellow-motorists, dreamed of obeying it, and it had the effect of enabling the local authorities to levy ransom, as arbitrary as that extorted by brigands, from any motorists who might chance to pass through their police traps. The law was thus brought into hatred, ridicule and contempt; motorists soon acquired the habit of becoming a law unto themselves, and chancing the risk of a fine as of a misfortune equally liable to fall on the just and the unjust. Cars were openly advertised to go at three or four times the speed limit, and owners saw that they got their money's worth. Motor racing was a sport soon imported from the Continent—the Brooklands track was opened in 1907—and the strong spice of danger traditionally welcome to the Englishman contributed in no small degree to its popularity as a spectacle.

The roads, which had gone to sleep since the coming of the railway, had reawoken to crowded activity. Horseless carriages now dashed along them at speeds that rivalled those of express trains, and the rail-less truck had begun to make its appearance. The brief heyday of the bicycle, as a sport and a luxury, was past, though on Sundays there might still be seen occasional bunches of young men, and even maidens, pounding and sweating along, crouched over their handlebars. But the joy of speed was no more for the cyclist when he was liable to be continually splashed and dusted, and occasionally killed, by cars that rushed past honking him indignantly gutterwards. The push-bike was declining to an utilitarian

conveyance, much employed by workmen in getting to and from their jobs.

The road system was compelled to adapt itself to a volume and speed of traffic for which it had never been intended. Its powers of adaptation were naturally limited. The thing most easily transformed was the surface, and during the early years of the century the alternate dustiness and greasiness of the main highways had been to a large extent mitigated by the practice of tar-spraying. But to widen and straighten the roads, to eliminate the murderous blind corners, and to soften precipitous gradients, was a task that had only just begun to be tinkered at in pre-War days. The situation was worst of all in the towns, where not only was any comprehensive scheme of street widening usually out of the question, but where the congestion and danger were all too frequently enhanced by the shortsighted zeal of municipal authorities in laying down tramlines.

It was not only the road system that was in need of readjustment, but the nervous systems of those who used and dwelt by the roads. Already, before the coming of the motor-car, the conditions of modern civilization had put an ever-increasing strain on human powers of adaptation. But now the barrage of stimuli was intensified to drumfire. The noises incidental to the conversion of roads into speedways called for a corresponding tightening up of the nerves, and the pedestrian, especially in the towns, who wished to preserve life and limb, was compelled to keep his attention continually on the stretch, to practise himself in continual estimates of the speed of fast-approaching vehicles, and to scuttle or dodge for his life as often as he ventured off the pavement.

By the beginning of the new reign, an even swifter mode of transit, and one of far more alarming potentialities, had come into use. Ever since the days of Minoan Crete, the lord of creation had been inclined

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to chafe at his inferiority to the meanest cabbage white or house-sparrow in the matter of flight. Up to the end of the nineteenth century, nothing practical had come of it, beyond the ability to drift precariously about in the cars of balloons. But in more than the literal sense it might have been said that flying was in the air. One of the commonest forms of book about the future concerned the man who had worked out the plans of a completely efficient airship, and thereby achieved power to impose his own terms, or those of the secret society he happened to patronize, on the rest of the species. Meanwhile, numbers of inventors were working out the designs of flying machines that never quite succeeded in flying. Even advanced thinkers were inclined to be doubtful whether anything more than an ingenious toy was likely to be the final product of these activities, and there were still pious folk to deplore the presumption of those who invited the wrath of the Lord by improving upon His plan of creation.

It was the success of the brothers Wright, in 1903, that at last made it clear to the world that the age of flying had actually dawned, and after that progress was astonishingly rapid. So implicit was the faith in any sort of mechanical improvement, that nothing but delighted applause was excited, in 1909, by what might well have been counted for one of the most ominous events in British history. For on the 25th of July Britain ceased to be an island, in the sense of land unapproachable save by water. A Frenchman, M. Blériot, undeterred by the failure of a compatriot a few days previously, succeeded in piloting his monoplane across the Channel and landing in a field near Dover. Henceforth Britannia might lord it as she would over the waves—her iron walls were no protection against an enemy who could fly over them.

The effect upon civilization of transferring war to

a third dimension was hardly guessed at the time, and the breaking of the peace mercifully came too soon for it to be more than dimly foreshadowed even during the four terrible years that ensued. But already it was becoming evident that the aeroplane and airship did not exhaust the possibilities. If iron walls could be flown over for the purpose of laying waste cities, they could be dived under with equally deadly effect against the commerce that kept these cities alive. No less an authority than Admiral Percy Scott, known to be one of the most scientific officers in the navy, was making civilian flesh creep by proclaiming the helplessness of a surface navy against the submarine. Like most enthusiasts for a new invention, the Admiral was inclined, if not to overrate its potentialities, at least to antedate them, though in the event the submarine just, but only just, failed to bring England to her knees.

The most spectacular feature of these early years of George V's reign was undoubtedly the conquest of the air. In an incredibly short time after Blériot's feat, the sight and sound of an aeroplane had become familiar to dwellers on the route from Croydon to the Continent. Records for speed, height, and distance were continually being surpassed. Stunt flying began to be practised, and the loop was successfully looped. With construction still in the experimental stage, the life of a leading airman was held on the most precarious tenure, but the number of prominent casualties only increased the thrills of this new chase after speed. It is no wonder that Alfred Harmsworth, whom even elevation to the Baronage could not cure of his passion for being ahead of the times, made it his special business to expedite the development of aeronautics with all the resources of his press.

The cult of the thrill followed inevitably from this universal speeding up, and answered to the need for



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some stimulus violent enough to impress itself upon nerves dulled by the bombardment of lesser stimuli. It was not likely that a nice discrimination would be fostered under such conditions. Crude stimuli tend to provoke reactions proportionately crude. A sensational age is likely to be also one of mafficking, of crazes, of panics, and all forms of emotional incontinence.

In every department of life, in politics and journalism, in religion, in art and the employment of leisure, the evidences of this tendency are overwhelming and world-wide during the years immediately preceding the War. It was not by chance that mechanical invention was giving birth to a new form of entertainment that was destined to exercise a profound effect on the popular mentality. This was the moving picture, a hueless dumb-show whose cheapness and popularity led to its being turned, by mass production, to what can only be described as the basest uses.

There had long flourished a kind of popular melodrama in which incident had been so conventionalized and character so simplified as to make it equally remote from life and art. This nobody with the least pretensions to culture had hitherto dreamed of patronizing, but the shrewd business men who were developing the cinema industry instinctively hit upon it as providing the most easily applied formula for the standardization of plots. Crude and primitive as the old Surrey Side stuff had been, the mechanical limitations of the screen play ensured that this should be cruder and more primitive still. Before the post-War advent of the sound film, the persons of the drama were deprived of the gift of human speech, except in so far as the action could be suspended, and printed words projected on to the screen. Thus cut off from the possibility of communicating thought, except by this terribly cumbrous device, and without

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even the brute beast's language of a cry, the characters were forced to betray their emotions by an extravagance of grimace and gesture that had hitherto been foreign to the English character. Such limitations would have reduced even Hamlet to the Surrey Side level, and beneath what had hitherto been the lowest deep of melodrama yawned an even lower deep of movie drama.

The world to which the audience was transported was thus one from which intelligence was practically eliminated, and in which character was mechanized into the dominance of some one motive easily understood of the people. Beauty, in this world without colour, was reduced to its lowest form of sex appeal. There remained only emotion, of a necessarily primitive order, finding vent in action. The cinema drama, when it aspired to be serious, was thus melodrama minus dialogue and reduced to its lowest term of thrills—a succession of pursuits, perils, escapades and embraces. A typical motive was for some intensively advertised blonde, with the goggling eyes of desirable maidenhood, to be lured, through the machinations of some persevering diabolist, into various predicaments that in real life could have had no other issue than that of her death by drowning, crushing, boiling, falling, or shooting, but which on the screen were equally certain to be terminated by the intervention of a swain, selected by a process of rigorous elimination as being the kind of lover in whose arms the greatest number of prospective patronesses would like to dream of themselves as being borne to safety. The apotheosis of these fortunate performers, like that of the pagan deities, into stars for universal worship, was already being actively capitalized. There was at least one World's Sweetheart, though—so ephemeral is this kind of fame—one fails to remember what precise title was coined for her opposite number of the male sex.

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The nearest approach to art on the screen was in a few avowedly comic films. Not a little first-class clowning can be accomplished by means of expression and gesture. One enormously successful performer in this vein, Mr. Charles Chaplin, might fairly have claimed to be the Grimaldi of the twentieth century, and to have brought the time-honoured clown, and his predecessor the fool, up-to-date as the *ingenu* in a bowler. But the comic spirit, as Meredith conceived of it, could find no harbourage on the movie screen, for irony or satire without words is not easily compassed. And the ordinary film comic without a Chaplin, a Max Lindener, or a John Bunny, was the crudest imaginable kind of knockabout—in these pre-War days perhaps nine out of ten must have relied for their humour on some form of chase, in which the pursuers, for some reason of technique, would invariably halt at a corner, crouch, gesticulate, and resume motion with one simultaneous jerk forward.

The advantages of the film for educational purposes, for revealing the marvels of science, and for displaying to those who must needs stay at home the kingdoms of the world and the glory thereof, were seldom exploited, and then only in the most perfunctory way. It was soon discovered that this was not the sort of thing the public wanted, while boys and girls, who did not pay for their own education, created no effective demand for the enlivening of their curriculum, though a well-stimulated juvenile demand for thrills, out of school hours, might have its effect in increasing the supply of criminal, suggestive, or merely inane pabulum to these little ones.

It is characteristic of the film drama that to none of its products was there hope of more than a passing notoriety. None even of the stars who made fortunes, and whose worshippers were numbered by the million, could preserve their creations from the

scrap-heap. They ran their few months' course, harvested their profit, and gave place to later novelties. Revivals were practically unknown. The public interested themselves in performers, but the personality of the dramatist meant as little to them as that of the man who operated the camera. Often there was no dramatist at all, but merely an expert whose business it was to take some novel or stage play and, by depriving it of words and thought, to adapt it for the screen in the form of pure action.

As a mind-forming influence it would be hard to overrate the importance of the cinema. By the time George V ascended the throne, the habit of going to the pictures was already on its way to become universal. Children scrounged the uttermost penny out of their parents for admission to the cheapest seats; young women expected, as a matter of right, to be escorted thither by their suitors; tired housewives snatched a weekly or bi-weekly oblivion of the job that never was done; workers of all kinds found an escape from the monotony of their daily grind, on the prairies of a wilder West than ever cowboy knew, or in the knight-errantry of delivering the only girl in the world from the Cave of Dread, or the path of the approaching express.

The function of the pictures was similar in kind, though more telling by reason of their being directly impressed on the senses, to that of the mass-produced journalism that had followed a universal literacy. They had the fascination, and something of the effect on the mind, of a new drug. They afforded a cheap escape from the reality of a mechanized civilization, to which human mentality had only superficially adapted itself. Somewhere, in the depths of his being, the poor little street-bred person knew that he or she was bored, and perhaps humiliated. That was why, in the nineties, he had waved his paper flag and taken to himself an empire, and why she had dreamed

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of a world peopled by glorious aristocrats whose pleasures one could share in day dreams. Man was a caged animal, fed and cared for to the utmost capacity of science, but pacing feverishly behind his bars and dreaming of open spaces he had never seen. And here in the picture-house was a means of escape more congenial to refined sensibilities than that of the gin palace or opium den.

Readers of Ibsen will remember how, when that most determined of all fugitives from reality, Peer Gynt, escaped into the world of mountain trolls, he was offered the hand of the King's daughter on condition of having his eyes put out, so as nevermore to be disillusioned. That is the condition attached to all such modes of escape—the mind's eye gets dimmed, the mind itself atrophied. Once having accomplished the act of faith implied in this plucking out the mind's eye and casting it from him, the rest was easy for the fugitive. Unlike works of art or the services of religion, the pictures demanded of him no mental effort, no concentration, for their enjoyment. He had not even, as in the bar parlour, to accomplish the possibly arduous feat of conveying the liquor to his lips. He had only to sit still, as he might have in the electric chair, and allow the thrills to be administered. This was education, no doubt—but to what end?

This tendency to eliminate mental effort might have been observed in another form of popular entertainment. The musical comedy, that had held the stage during King Edward's reign, and had incidentally been a means of providing brides for the more susceptible members of the aristocracy, was now being successfully competed with by the revue. Here, in an age of progress, was at least one example of evolution from better to worse. For the predecessor of the musical comedy had been the comic opera, which in the hands of Offenbach, and of the Gilbert-Sullivan

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combination, had been a genuine art form, not a few of whose products, like good wine, only mellowed with the passage of years. In the musical comedy, for the witty dialogue and the quite sufficient plot of the Gilbertian model were substituted lumps of conventional padding between the songs and choruses for which the play was an excuse. But in the revue even the semblance of connection between the different episodes was almost, if not quite, abandoned. The playgoer was no longer required to tax his mind with the labour of following even the ghost of a story. He had only to sit still in his seat and allow a series of disconnected thrills to be administered to him.

For one form of emotional stimulus, however, it was at least necessary to keep moving. The country was in the grip of a dancing craze that waxed ever faster and more furious as the pre-War period swept to its close. In the gay days of King Edward the undisputed mistress of the ballroom had still been the waltz, at first chiefly in the Parisian vein of *Valse Bleue* and *Sourir d'Avril*, but later with the light-hearted sensuousness of Vienna, as in *The Merry Widow*. Even if some of the shallow and reckless frivolity of the Viennese spirit may have crept into this later music, the strains were at least those of the European civilization of which Austria had so long been the bulwark. But this was not enough to satisfy the restless spirit of the pre-War years. Not delicacy but strength was what jaded nerves demanded by way of stimulus. And this was to be found in the exotic, the savage, the criminal. There was even an attempt to acclimatize the frankly lustful dances of the Parisian *apaches*, and it was perhaps due more than anything else to the difficulty of the step that it failed to take on, a handicap that also prevented the full triumph of the not dissimilar Argentine tango.

It was to the American negro that the fashionable world ultimately had resort for the satisfaction of an

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unexpressed craving. The history of the negro influence is one that might repay study. The nigger song was popular as early as the sixties—Mr. Gladstone was a particular admirer of *Camptown Races*. Like the child and the foreigner, the negro provoked the laugh of conscious superiority, though, as befitted the romantic spirit of the times, young negresses were granted a chivalrous exemption from the stigma of comicality. On an old screen, dating from the late fifties, there are pasted some lively scenes of plantation merry-making, and it is to be noted that though the swains and matrons are figures of fun, with enormous jutting lips, the dancing girls are shepherdesses or colleens with faces becomingly bronzed.

In the nineties the vogue of the Christy Minstrels had started a rage for plantation songs. In the most popular of these, the amorous motive was more to the fore than that of pure farce. But it was the amorousness of children, naïve and pleasantly ridiculous—it had about it not the least tinge of sensuality. For some mysterious reason, nearly every troubadour of the banjo was expected to address his serenade to a nymph bearing the name of Lulu. And quite funny, in their innocent way, some of them were.

But simple Sambo was no more the typical negro than the Pat of the English comic paper was the typical Irishman. From time to time stories got into the papers of dreadful outrages that had led to even more dreadful lynchings. Sam's amorous nature, it seemed, was rather closer to the jungle than to the nursery. And it was to the jungle rather than to the nursery that the thrill-seekers of the pre-War years instinctively turned. For the first time some of the real negro spirit began to penetrate to England. For the negro, in his native Africa, had not only possessed an art of sculpture, whose merits, thanks to Mr. Roger Fry, were just beginning to win European recognition, but he had expressed himself by a form of music

which, unlike the sculpture, had survived his transportation into slavery. More, perhaps, than any other type of human being, he had rhythm in his soul, and also in his feet, for even the preachers, who retained the medicine man's art of arousing their congregations to hypnotic frenzy, were not unknown to dance instinctively about the rostrum from which their message was delivered.

It was only very gradually that syncopated ragtime—to give it its pre-War name—came into competition with the European dance rhythms. Quite early in the century a negroid dance called the two-step came in, just as that last relic of Victorian romanticism, the barn dance, died out, and two or three of these would be a feature of the average programme. But the main stress was still on the comic side of the negro character. A great deal was heard, about this time, of cake-walking, a grotesque performance whose practice was not considered entirely refined. The very word ragtime has an unmistakably comic implication. But music has its own way of ignoring definitions, and no censor has ever been able to prevent it from expressing passions that would be taboo in any other medium. In those last hectic days of peace, the walls of the most respectable dance-rooms were beginning to re-echo the tom-tom rhythms of the devil dance, the same rhythms that in black-ruled Haiti had inspired the bloodstained orgies of voodoo, and, in the Southern States, had provided a Christian outlet for passions sometimes not entirely dissimilar.

It is hard to say where the comic ended and the primitive began, but the transition is marked by the gradual supersession of the two-step, with its jerky motion, suggestive of the cake-walk, by the hypnotic rhythm of the one-step, in all the many forms it assumed before, during the War, they were amalgamated under twin designations of one-step and fox-



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trot. Variations were imported from across the Atlantic that shocked old-fashioned people by their frankly sexual intent—the turkey-trot, for instance, and the bunny-hug, in which a modern dancer would recognize the germs of the fox-trot. In these, the man held his partner squarely face to face, instead of partially sideways, an innovation that caused a certain indignant chaperon to remark to her neighbour, at a London dance, “If you ask me, my dear, it’s just embracing each other in the middle of the room,” and the redoubtable Mr. Punch to blazon in a full-page cartoon his desire to kick bunny-huggers. The posture seems harmless enough now, and the more extravagant variations of the one-step were never considered quite good form.

The real significance of the negroid craze lay in its music, and above all in its syncopated rhythm, that differed from the Viennese waltz lilt as neat brandy differs from light wine. Like the tom-toms from which it was derived, it had a hypnotic effect, which was enhanced by the nature of the movement, half-walk, half-shuffle, that it substituted for the dreamy convolutions of the waltz. While it stunned thought, its hammer-like beat did undoubtedly act as an agreeable stimulant on the most jaded nervous system. There was a kick in it such as there had been in no previous dance music. And its tendency was to implant a craving for excitement at all costs, to create that characteristically modern disposition that is bored when it is not being stimulated, and is consequently incapable of reflection or of depth. Thus, with the cinema and ragtime, the city of Mansoul was being assaulted, simultaneously, at Eye-Gate and Ear-Gate—and by the same enemy.

This is not for a moment to deny that the cinema opens a field for creative effort whose possibilities have even now hardly begun to be realized, or that negro music as a mode of artistic expression can be

as potent and original as the corresponding sculpture. But the fate of art-forms, when commercialized, is that of pearls in the pig tub—they do not change their nature, but they may form a very unhealthy diet. This is equally true of the sensational triumph, during these years, of another form of art, whose appeal, to a more restricted public than that of the dance-rooms, lay less in its beauty than in its flamboyant barbarism. This was the Russian ballet and opera, not the least of whose attractions was the riot of colour effects in its costume designing and scene painting, wherein the most vivid of primary colours were placed in a juxtaposition that—almost incredibly—achieved harmony out of discord. The music was but the colour translated, with absolute fidelity, into sound. But it would be absurd to pretend that it was on its artistic merits alone that the new mode achieved success. The attitude of the English public to opera may be gauged by the fact that Mr. Hammerstein's attempt to start a new opera house in Kingsway was a failure from the start—the public preferred it as a music hall. It was even doubtful whether the original Opera House at Covent Garden would be able to pay its way much longer—that it did so was admittedly due to the rich people for whom a box was a mark of social distinction, like a family pew. So that it is not unfair to conjecture that the success of the Russian opera and ballet was, like of the pictures and jazz, that of a stimulus—that its wild, barbaric discords of colour and sound were brandy of a rarer vintage than that patronized by the mob, but brandy, for all that, neat and intoxicating.

On every side, and in every class of society, might have been witnessed this same wild cult of the thrill. Its manifestations were all-pervading, from the apotheosis of sport that made Saturday afternoon an orgy of excitement for crowds sometimes topping the hundred thousand, to the well-advertised extravagances

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whereby the members of a Society, now frankly resigned to plutocratic standards, strove to keep the boredom of their leisure from becoming intolerable. The master thrill-seeker of the time was surely the young baronet who, in order to liven up an evening party of both sexes, jumped in his clothes off a boat into the Thames and was drowned.

That was one of many episodes of the time that seem, in retrospect, to have a strangely symbolic import, as if there was a consciousness abroad that the pace of life was too killing to last, and that those who wanted to enjoy the fruits of civilization must do so in haste, before they turned to ashes. It was a psychologist of genius who thought of adding to the thrills provided by London's stucco elysia one that consisted in smashing, with missiles provided for the purpose, as much as possible of the cheap china arranged on a dresser. The violent destruction of something that appeared useful—and would doubtless have been useful to many a poor housewife—was a luxury worth parting with countless sixpences to obtain. The time was not far distant when it would be possible to have one's bellyful of smashing, and being smashed, with missiles of a different nature.

It was in the early spring of 1912 that the crowning product of mechanical civilization, the vast ship aptly named *Titanic*, left Southampton on her maiden voyage for New York. She was not only furnished with every luxury that science could provide and money could buy, but she was actually proclaimed to be unsinkable. There were millionaires galore among her passengers, as well as that pioneer of modern journalism, and devout worshipper of everything titanic and record breaking, Mr. W. T. Stead. She was safe, safe as the civilization that had produced her, so safe that nobody on board even thought in terms of safety, still less realized that, rather than brook a single hour's delay, the Captain had felt it

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his duty to rush her blindly in the dark through a sea infested with icebergs. One of these ripped her open as easily as if her thin plates had been paper, and so gently that her passengers only knew that the throbbing of the engines had ceased and the unsinkable ship lay calmly at rest on a glassy sea. Not long afterwards it began to dawn on them that she had been deemed too safe to make it worth while to provide boats for more than a minority of those on board. And imperceptibly, inch by inch, with her lights blazing and all her splendour intact, the great Unsinkable was settling down in the icy water—not all the resources of science and skill of seamanship availing aught for the fifteen hundred trapped souls who remained after the last boat had pulled away. It is said that some second-class passengers solaced their last moments by occupying the first-class saloon. . . . It was more than two hours before the *Titanic* towered up on end, with her machinery crashing through her hull—and then there was no more ship, but a cry upon the waters that lasted for some ten minutes and faded into silence.

That other unsinkable ship called Civilization had yet two more years to race over smooth waters before her safety likewise was called in question.

## CHAPTER II

### THE INTRANSIGENCE OF POLITICS

The intransigence that is everywhere the note of these pre-War years is only their thrill-cult in another aspect. Just as hardened drinkers get to taking their spirits neat, and drug fiends to increasing the strength of their injections, so every fresh speeding up in the pace of life creates a corresponding demand for emotional dope, whose supply, by still further jading the nerves, again increases the demand. The most powerful stimulus of all is that of the herd or team spirit. To have a side of your own, to identify yourself with its fortunes, to set it at variance with some enemy, to work up a frenzy of excitement over the vicissitudes of the struggle, and, God willing, to achieve the master thrill of the knock-out, becomes a psychological necessity. Where such opportunities do not exist, they must be invented.

We, who know through what outlet this manufactured energy at length burst forth upon town and countryside, are apt to think that the Englishman's strongest pre-War antagonism was that expressed in the roars of defiance and shrieks of terror in the press, on the subject of the German peril. This is to make the mistake of measuring the intensity of an emotion by the magnitude of its cause. Germany was no doubt always in the emotional field, but except during the great naval panic of 1909 and times of acute international crisis, it was generally in the background, and even the steady undercurrent of fear was too continuous and unvaried to secure emotional precedence. The antagonisms of party, of class, of sex,

and even of sport, could be relied on more continuously to provide those increments of stimulus that the nerves required.

Wherever it was possible to arouse the team spirit, it had to be inflamed to the fiercest heat of antagonism. In the political war, the consciousness, at least on the front benches, that it was a game, did not prevent it from becoming the skin game. Lord Milner's "damn the consequences" might have served for its motto. The Lords had damned them to the point of constitutional revolution; Mr. Lloyd George had countered by fanning the flame of social revolution; and it was soon to become apparent that even civil war was a consequence that could be cheerfully damned by both sides alike. In the daily give and take of Parliamentary life it was more apparent, with every passing session, how woefully manners had declined from Victorian standards towards those of the bear-garden. "Scenes" were of ever more frequent occurrence; they were stunted in the press, and the detailed report of them was received with more delight than what sub-editors thought worth recording of argument or rhetoric. In May, 1905, the Liberals, being then in opposition, had howled down that most inoffensive of ministers, Mr. Lyttelton, and before the final passage of the Parliament Bill, Mr. Asquith was similarly howled down, with cries of "Traitor", by the Unionists. The interchange of abuse and invective of the crudest description became more and more common—even Mr. Balfour once so far forgot himself, at a political luncheon, as to accuse the Lord Advocate of a "frigid and calculated lie"; on another occasion one of the young Diehard hotbloods in the Commons twitted some Labour members with being drunk. This sort of thing, with the row that was sure to follow, was decidedly more to the taste of the time than the old-fashioned set-piece orations.

After the Diehard fiasco in the Lords, it was soon

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evident that Mr. Balfour's days as a leader were numbered. He had certainly been inclined to treat politics as a game, but as a more gentlemanly and intellectual game than many of his followers, and their backers in the press, were minded to play. The stunt press had now so great a power of suggestion as to be able to undermine the authority of the most powerful statesman. This power was now directed against Balfour. A man who could see not only one, but several aspects of a question, who could suspend judgment, and who preferred the rapier to the bludgeon, was not cut out for leadership in a swiping match. One of those thought-saving incantations, which were now essential to controversy, was coined—"Balfour must go", and lest this should put too heavy a strain on the memory, it was shortened to its initials—B.M.G. As Mr. Balfour was not the man to cling to his post in such circumstances, go he did, with his customary blandness and, it may be, a hardly perceptible shrug.

The Unionists were some time in agreeing on a successor, as the two most obvious candidates, being each the choice of a different section of the party, cancelled each other out, and resource was finally had to a certain Mr. Bonar Law, of Scottish-Canadian origin, who was known to be an uncompromising Tariff Reformer with a good head for figures, and whose hard-hitting style of oratory was not likely to be cramped by such intellectual subtlety as that of Balfour. Bonar Law, who was by nature the mildest and most modest of men, proved to be possessed of better qualities than those on whose strength he had been chosen leader, but before the War had sunk the partisan in the patriot, he was regarded, not without admiration, in the light of a Tory Sausage-seller, capable of out-facing and out-Limehousing the Radical Cleon.

A strange light was thrown on the state of English

politics by the great Marconi scandal that came to a head in 1913. In the spring of the previous year there had been a boom in the shares of the English Marconi Company, on account of a Government contract for the erection of an imperial chain of wireless stations. Rumours began to circulate to the effect that certain members of the Government had made a good thing out of their official knowledge by speculating in the shares of this company. This charge, when it was raised in Parliament, the ministers in question had emphatically denied—and with literal truth. But what they had, as it subsequently transpired, refrained from stating, was that they had speculated in the shares of the American Marconi Company, which, though subsidiary to the English, was not directly concerned with the contract, and furthermore, that a substantial amount of the Liberal Party secret funds had been similarly dealt with by the Chief Whip.

The matter was now deemed serious enough to call for investigation by a Select Committee of the Commons. A more farcical body could not have been imagined. The pretence of judicial honour was thrown to the winds, and the members of the committee functioned on strictly party lines, deflected, perhaps, by a fear of reprisals, from too uncompromising a demand for light on matters that both parties alike had an interest in concealing. The Unionist minority drafted a scathing report alleging impropriety, though not actual corruption; the Liberals, on the other hand, professed to regard the whole proceedings as perfectly legitimate and proper; while the Liberal chairman made a solitary attempt to hold the scales even by expressing his regret at the purchase, even in good faith, of the American shares, and at the subsequent ministerial economy of candour.

All ended happily in a debate in which the accused ministers were considered to have displayed a can-



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dour at once disarming and tactful. Their careers were in no way prejudiced, and in fact one of them was shortly deemed worthy of promotion to the highest judicial office. In the light of subsequent events, it may be argued fortunate, or the reverse, that the standards of Mr. Gladstone's day, when Lord Chancellor Westbury had been ruined for a trifling indiscretion, had been relaxed in a more tolerant century. The purist minority, who wanted to probe beneath the smooth surface of politics, as mirrored in the newspapers, was insignificant and powerless in face of the great, complacent public, which was only too grateful for any new thrill, and, having been duly stimulated, would go on to to-morrow's sensation and forget all about to-day's.

Another sign of the times was the increasing disposition to dispense not only with the decencies of Parliamentary life, but with the laws that Parliament passed. This, the principle of the Irish land campaign and the Passive Resistance stunt, was asserted again, on the level of broad farce, when Mr. Lloyd George, in 1912, introduced a scheme of compulsory insurance, on the Bismarckian model, against sickness and unemployment. The Bill, during its passage through the Commons, occasioned a decided, though temporary, setback to its author's popularity, as the English wage-earner still retained enough of his Victorian individualism to resent anything that savoured overmuch of regimentation. The Lords, perhaps chastened into prudence by their *débâcle* of the previous year, stood aside rather sulkily to let the obnoxious measure pass. Not so the more intransigent of their female supporters, who were outraged at the suggestion that they should moisten, with their own proper saliva, the stamps for the insurance cards of their domestics. It was too much! Not all the leagued powers of the State and Government should drive them to this humiliation. They would set a

watch over their tongues and keep the door of their lips. They would brave—if not exactly death—whatever does happen when forms are not filled in. A new kind of stamp-moistener appeared in certain shop windows, fashioned in the image of the Chancellor, with a lolling tongue, and the inscription, “Let him lick his own stamps!” But the enraged mistresses never even got as far as passive resistance. Perhaps the tongues in question had been so desperately overworked in the preliminary stages of the battle, that the additional effort was nothing accounted of when it came to the sticking-point.

It was in the following year that an incident showed how deeply the new intransigence had penetrated even into the fold of the Christian Church. At Kikuyu, in East Africa, a conference had been called representing the various non-Catholic denominations of Christ’s followers, in order to co-ordinate their efforts to fulfil His last command, that the Gospel should be preached to all nations. The various delegates, beside treating each other in the light of colleagues and fellow-workers, had actually knelt together at their Master’s Table. That such amenities could be shared with Dissenters by members of the Anglican communion was enough to rouse the righteous wrath of the Anglo-Catholic Bishop of Zanzibar, who thundered a charge of heresy at his brother-pastors of Uganda and East Africa. The opportunity for participating in so glorious a row was eagerly embraced by Anglo-Catholics and Hot Gospellers at home. The best comment on the situation was that of Mr. Will Dyson, then the cartoonist of the *Daily Herald*, who depicted a couple of black chiefs looking at a surging Donnybrook of umbrellas and croziers.

“Ah,” remarks one of them, “a religious difference, no doubt.”

“No, sah!” replies the other, “a religious sameness.”

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A sameness indeed—it was about this time that 610 monks of Mount Athos, who had dared to assert the divinity of their Master's name as well as His personality, were seized upon by the Tsar's soldiers and deported to Russia, with the full approval of the Holy Synod<sup>1</sup>—a body whose enthusiasm for persecution was destined to be somewhat cooled in the near future. But then, what mattered a religious sameness in a social order so nearly emancipated from bonds of faith? It was otherwise with a spiritual sameness extending to every department of civilized life.

<sup>1</sup> *Annual Register*, 1913, pp. 338–9.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE INTRANSIGENCE OF CLASS

During these opening years of George V's reign, men who observed the signs of the times instinctively felt that, in the Russian phrase, the sledge of civilization had begun to slide downhill. And there were some, even then, who foreboded not war, but revolution, as the end of the progress. For if the spirit of Bismarck was mighty yet, so likewise was that of Karl Marx, nor was blood and iron Nationalism pushed, by the most ruthless of sabre-rattlers, to the length envisaged by the advocates of class war.

The new spirit was, in fact, beginning to pervade the world of Labour, and to pervade it from below, for—from the extremist standpoint—the career of the Labour Party in Parliament had been something of a disappointment. Steady old Trades Union officials, who had earned their candidature by long years of patient service, were out of their depth at Westminster. Besides, even at this early stage, a fissure was perceptible between this Trades Union section of the party, pursuing limited and severely practical ends, and the high Socialist apostles of Independent Labour. So it came about that Labour in the House came to stand for little more than a detached group of left-wing Liberals. Of the two leaders who supplied its brains, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald was fast establishing his right, along with Asquith and Balfour, to the style of a great Parliamentarian, while Mr. Philip Snowden was plainly destined, when John Morley had quitted the stage, to stand without question for the last of the stern unbending Radicals.

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It was among the rank and file that the new spirit of class warfare was beginning to spread. Since the piping times of Victorian progress, prosperity had not gone forward with the sureness that, according to the prevalent faith, it ought to have done. Up to the middle of the nineties, the wage-earner had found his real wages, after allowing for temporary fluctuations, on the up-grade, that is to say, his receipts on pay day would procure for him and his missus more of the good things of life than would have been the case a few years back. But just before the close of the century, the worker discovered that the tide of his prosperity had reached its high-watermark, and that not only did real wages fail to register an increase, but that what tendency could be perceived was towards a decline.

From the middle of the nineties on to the War, there was a gradual and fairly continuous rise in prices. One, and probably the chief, cause of this was the influx of gold into the world's economic system from the South African mines. What this meant for the wage-earner and housewife may best be grasped from the figures given in the *Yearbook of Social Progress* for 1913-14, where it is calculated that the pound of 1895 and 1896 had come to be worth 18s. 5d. in 1900 and had dropped by 1912 to 16s. 3d., "figures which," to quote the appended comment, "are . . . sufficiently serious to account for some of the prevailing unrest."

It is to this day a disputed question precisely to what extent wages rose to keep pace with this rise in the cost of living, but the most favourable estimate does not suggest that the workman could get more for his pay, and it seems that wages lagged—as in such circumstances they are almost bound to lag—behind prices. At any rate, there can be no doubt that this was the impression made on the workers themselves, and that, with the housekeeping bills

going slowly but surely up, it seemed as if times were steadily getting harder. No doubt there were other factors than the value of wages to take into account. In addition to his private earnings the worker drew a steadily increasing dividend from the common stock of society in the form of pure water, efficient drainage, free education for his children, a pension for his old age, and a score of other aids and amenities. But it is hardly in human nature to keep a strict account of such things. For the worker, the acid test of prosperity was the one of wages, that was now beginning to yield such discouraging results.

It is true that the influx of gold had had a stimulating effect on trade. These pre-War years of the twentieth century were, like those of the eighteenth fifties and sixties, marked by mounting and staggering statistics. The combined value of imports and exports topped the thousand million mark for the first time in 1906, and by 1913 they had put on more than an extra four hundred thousand. This was a heavy blow to Tariff Reform propaganda, as it seemed, on the face of it, to stultify Mr. Chamberlain's gloomy prognostications during the opening stages of his campaign.

But there was all the difference in the world, from the wage-earner's standpoint, between this pre-War prosperity and that of mid-Victorian times. Then the workman had been getting something definite and tangible out of progress, more, in proportion, than the ordinary investor, with the interest value of capital on the down-grade. Wages had been rising steadily in nominal and still more in real value, and in consequence, there had never been a time of so little discontent or subversive activity. But in the twentieth century the very spectacle of prosperity added to the worker's discontent. For this time there seemed as if there were something wrong with the working of the social system. The more there

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was to distribute, the less did he, who constituted the majority and bore the burden of production, seem to be getting out of it. By that acid test of real wages, he was actually getting less than before. All these mounting millions, it seemed, must be going somewhere, must be getting collared by someone. Whither, then, and by whom?

The answer is suggested by certain highly suggestive curves traced in the 1911 edition of Mr. Chiozza Money's *Riches and Poverty*, and representing the fluctuations, up to 1908, of profits and wages. Taking the figures for 1900 as having a comparative value of 100, we find that, by 1908, wages have only risen, in nominal value, to 101—a positive drop in real value—whereas profits have gone up to 112½. Or, to look at it in another way, between 1893 and 1908, nominal wages have increased by 12 per cent, and profits by only ½ per cent short of 30<sup>1</sup>—which means that the capitalist has managed to get approximately two and a half times the nominal increase of the workman's takings, and, in real values, to get all, or more than all, of whatever increase may have been harvested.

Nor had the workman even the comfort of feeling that booming trade had solved his other pressing problem of finding a secure market for his labour. Before the establishment of unemployment insurance, there are no reliable figures to go upon, but it is admitted that though in boom years, like 1913, the evil was reduced to a minimum, there was always a substantial floating mass of unemployed and unemployable, which, in the inevitable years of depression, might exceed half a million, and which, taking the lean years with the fat, the process of time did not show any appreciable tendency to diminish.

All this, as extremists did not fail to remark, was exactly what Karl Marx had prophesied of what he had called the capitalist system—one class producing

<sup>1</sup> pp. 112-13.

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the whole of the wealth, the other netting the whole of the profits, except such a bare residuum as would suffice to maintain the wage-earners in a condition more or less adequate to their jobs.

It must not be imagined that the average British workman was likely to figure out the situation as clearly as this, or to have any particular interest in those who did. He absorbed theory in much the same way as certain primitive animals respond to light, not through the eyes, but by allowing it to soak in diffusedly all over the body. There was no market for the Marxian Bible in England, still less was any notice taken of a disciple of his who, in the revolutionary underworld, was known as Lenin. And yet, in 1912, so shrewd an observer as Mr. H. G. Wells could warn his countrymen, in the columns of the *Daily Mail*, that England was "in a dangerous state of social disturbance", that "the discontent of the labouring mass of the community is deep and increasing" and that it might be that "we are in the opening phase of a real and irreparable class war."

This was a grave but hardly an exaggerated estimate of the situation. For while the worker did not excite himself particularly about the right to the whole produce of labour, he was harbouring what, for an Englishman, was the most serious of all grievances—he did not consider that he was getting fair play from his politicians, or his bosses, or even his own class leaders. Parliament, with its great Liberal-Labour majority, talked endlessly of Social Reform; his blood was stirred by Limehouse oratory; visions of "rare and refreshing fruit" were conjured up before his eyes—why should he be a beggar with the ballot in his hand? And yet the result of it all was that times were harder and unemployment just as rife, while thanks to the efforts of the snob press, the spectacle of insolent luxury was perpetually being paraded for his mingled delectation and envy. It was



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quite beside the point to argue that the "cream of society" represented no more than a small minority of the capitalist class—the worker trying to make ends meet on an exiguous pittance was not inclined to draw these fine distinctions.

The just literate town dweller, who peopled his world with the types presented to him by the press, had long ceased to think in terms of reality. By his own class journals the capitalist was represented as a hateful and bloated figure in a top-hat—usually too small for him—and a pair of mutton-chop whiskers. And the frankly commercial press helped on the good work by filling its columns with the filthiest and juiciest scandals in upper-class life that a week's sedulous muck-raking could supply. The spirit of hate was being worked up against the drawers of dividends as it was against the inhabitants of Germany, and how bitter it was can be judged by such contemporary cartoons as those of Mr. Will Dyson.

There is one in which the capitalist is shown playing cards, by drawing aces out of his boot, against a gaunt and starved-looking worker, who is surrounded by a crowd of officers, bishops, judges, and people in top-hats, all covering or threatening him with revolvers. In another, Fat, an alternative name for the investor, is shown frantically urging on Disease, Filth and the police—who evidently come under the same category—to bludgeon a defenceless working woman with a baby in her arms. Most significant of all is a cartoon of the Labour members on their knees in adoration of a top-hat.

There was a feeling abroad, sedulously cultivated, that if the worker wanted to have any chance against the capitalist, he must take his salvation into his own hands. On the Continent, and particularly in France, this new form of class warfare was associated with one of the innumerable "isms" of which modern thought was so prolific—Syndicalism, named after

the French word for a Trades Union, the idea being that the State is, by its very nature, incurably capitalist, and that the workman's whole loyalty is due to his associated fellow-workers in the same branch of industry. The object of each of these syndicates should be to possess itself of all the capital and means of production in its particular domain, and so become a vast, self-sufficing unit, linked in some sort of federation, not too clearly envisaged, with other similar units.

That was what one might call the anatomy of Syndicalism—its method was that of Marx pushed to its utmost extreme of ruthlessness. There could be neither peace nor co-operation nor friendship between master and man—the struggle was one of extermination to be waged by any means that were likely to be efficient. Violence and sabotage and calculated bad work had all their place in the new proletarian militancy, and the ultimate weapon was the General Strike, which, if it could be made properly watertight, would, it was confidently believed, enable the associated syndicates to inherit the earth without further ado.

The spread of the new intransigence to class war in England is signalized by a remarkable strike, in 1909, of a section of the students of the Ruskin, or Labour, College at Oxford, because the authorities were supposed to be contaminated by the influence of the old, and presumably capitalist, university. The rebels formed themselves into a Plebs League, and started a new college, in which there was to be no nonsense about humble, or indeed any, seeking after truth, but in which the course of instruction was to consist of naked propaganda, history and economics being doctored so as to bring them into line with the teachings of Marx, the irreconcilability of Capital and Labour being assumed as a fundamental dogma. This strange college drew a large measure

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of its support from the National Union of Railway-men and the South Wales Miners' Federation.<sup>1</sup>

The new gospel was preached first to the young—then, as always, the most promising recruits for a campaign of aggression. Redoubtable evangelists were abroad, the chief of them all being Mr. Tom Mann, who had studied Syndicalism at its French source, and who aimed not only at revolutionizing the Trades Unions, but even at transferring the allegiance of the common soldier from his King to his class. But the young men were not young enough to start being revolutionary. Even the children must be captured for the new movement, and for them there was the Socialist Sunday School, wherein little comrades might be suffered to come unto Marx.

The rapidity with which the propaganda of class war was beginning to infect Labour is not to be wondered at, when we consider that it was only the spirit of the time blowing where it listed, and driving masses of men like leaves before the first winter gales. It was not only the stern materialists of the Plebs who felt and fanned this spirit. One of the most interesting literary phenomena of these years was an attempt to revive the Romantic spirit in a consciously unromantic age by the brothers Chesterton and Mr. Hilaire Belloc. These gentlemen combined a cult of Christian orthodoxy and all things traditional with a militancy as rowdy as that of Mr. Kipling. The word "sword" exercised an extraordinarily stimulating effect on their emotions, and Mr. Belloc, who had besides imported from his native France and romanticized for English consumption a cult of Jew-baiting, was hardly less susceptible to the charm of the stake, if we may judge by such rousing refrains as,

Thank the Lord for the temporal sword,  
And howling heretics too !

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<sup>1</sup> *A History of British Socialism*, by M. Beer, Vol. II, p. 353.

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while Mr. Chesterton was capable of writing one of his finest sonnets in denunciation of a popular leader who had succeeded in avoiding a strike at Christmas, the resumption of tools being described as "the sheathing of a thousand swords," and the sextet rising to the solemn conclusion that "such men as we" would be "nearer Bethlehem," lying

Shot dead on scarlet snows for liberty,  
Dead in the daylight upon Christmas Day !

an awful but sublime spectacle, calculated, like the appearance of the Boojum, to evoke

A torrent of laughter and cheers.

What it amounted to was an attempt to create an emotional atmosphere in which the unsheathing of swords (by which convenient euphemism such varied activities may be covered as the slaughter of millions by mechanical weapons and a persuasive tap administered to the skull of a blackleg) is a noble and a sacred thing in itself, and to evoke a vision of Christ Swordsman cheering on Peter to have another whack at Malchus and fulminating woe unto the meek and the peacemakers—because they shall be called the poor in spirit.

These Neo-romantics, or Christian comedians, though they had all the intransigence of Syndicalists, had no direct influence on the Labour movement. Their propaganda of distributionist individualism was regarded, if at all, as a bourgeois fad. Their most important work was the chivalrous but hopeless campaign they waged with the object of exposing the true and inner workings of British politics and their linkage with cosmopolitan finance. But the public had no ears for such exposures. It followed the fortunes of its political as it did those of its football teams, and wanted no spoil-sport to animadvert upon the origin and financial backing of its champions.

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Besides, Mr. Belloc's Jew-baiting invective—which its most prominent victims are said to have regarded with an appreciation characteristically Jewish in its detachment—and his holy zeal to let the Catholic dogs have the best of it on every possible occasion, were bars to his being taken seriously—and in politics Mr. Belloc wielded the most incisive pen of the trio.

The young bloods of the Labour movement were out after very different game. There was no romance about the Marxian or syndicalist propaganda, which was frankly materialist, and aimed at appropriating all there was to be got out of the capitalist class. It was the now universal skin game as played between class and class to the inevitable end, which was the ruin of all parties alike.

The years just before the War witnessed an outbreak of strikes on such a scale as had never been seen before. A new element had entered into the warfare which was thoroughly in harmony with Syndicalist aims. It was realized that in certain essential services it was possible to aim a strike not only at the bosses, but at the whole community. A railway strike could create a sudden paralysis of economic life, a coal strike an even more deadly creeping paralysis, and a strike at the docks something like a food blockade—while all three combined might come not far short of applying that Syndicalist panacea, the General Strike. Such pressure might at least be relied upon to cause a Government, and particularly a Liberal Government, to intervene on the men's side.

The railwaymen were the first out, in August, 1911. This strike was largely the result of the new militant element among the rank and file forcing the hands of the leaders. It started after a number of local outbreaks, at what—though the country had no inkling of it—was a moment of acute peril, for, thanks to the Government's policy of backing French ambitions in Morocco, England was trembling on

the brink of a war with Germany, and the mere fact of the railway system being paralysed might have proved an irresistible temptation for the militarists at Berlin to stake everything on the chances of a surprise blow. After only three days of a stoppage that was by no means complete, a desperately anxious Government, thanks largely to the persuasive eloquence of Mr. Lloyd George, succeeded in getting the men back to work on a basis of complete reinstatement and the appointment of a Royal Commission to settle the points in dispute. This was proclaimed by the leaders as a complete victory, but the Commission's findings granted a good deal less than the full extent of the men's demands, and it was accordingly alleged that the leaders had been duped by the wily Chancellor, or had sold the pass to the enemy. And though there was no fresh strike on the railways, feeling among the men was more bitter than ever.

Next year it was the turn of the miners and the London dockers. The miners who, owing to the unique and dangerous nature of their calling, formed a community marked off with peculiar sharpness from the general body of the nation, were now beginning to organize themselves into the revolutionary spearhead of the Labour movement. As the miner was a trained specialist, whom it was impossible to replace, it was a matter of the greatest difficulty for even the Government to exert pressure on him. The creeping paralysis dragged on through the month of March, and the Government hurriedly rushed into law a Bill which conceded to the adult miner his demand for the lordly minimum of 5s. per day. Even so the men, whose fighting spirit was not to be appeased by anything short of full surrender, balloted against a resumption of work, and were only got back to the pits by the decision of their leaders to ignore anything less than a two-thirds majority.

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The dockers' strike, which took place during the summer, was an ignominious failure, and was marked by a spirit of uncompromising bitterness on both sides that left no room for such a reasonable solution as had secured the docker his tanner after the historic struggle of 1889. The new spirit was voiced by a prayer in which the dockers' leader, Mr. Ben Tillett, who had helped organize that former strike, exhorted an audience on Tower Hill to join with him in the fortunately unanswered prayer, "O God, strike Lord Devonport dead!" his Lordship, a Liberal tea-importer recently added to the nobility, being head of the Port of London Authority. There was also a fracas with the police in Hyde Park, a scrambling affair, considerably exaggerated in the press, of men who looked too pinched and miserable to do any effective rioting, and who were, in fact, being starved into surrender as surely as any besieged city.

The next year, 1913, was marked by a perfect fever of strikes, a particularly shocking case being that of the Dublin transport workers, which would have been more properly described as a sympathetic lock-out, engineered by the employers with the deliberate object of smashing a Trades Unionism as uncompromising as themselves. There was great distress, and rioting of a far more serious nature than the Hyde Park kind, with the Royal Irish Constabulary charging the crowds and breaking the heads of everybody, guilty or innocent, who came within reach of a truncheon. The spirit of class solidarity was infectious, and both strikes and lock-outs were showing a tendency to spread, like diseases, or like the wars of nations, in which one petty quarrel was liable to set the world aflame. Even the children were not exempt, and a touch of comedy was imparted to the situation by a strike of pupils in a Cheshire village school, with due accompaniment of

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processions and banners, in order to secure the appointment of a popular headmaster.

A more serious phenomenon was the beginning of negotiations between the Mining, Railway, and Transport Unions for a great Triple Alliance, whose combined action would be capable, it was believed, of bringing economic life to a standstill. If the war peril from Germany delayed much longer to materialize, it seemed quite on the cards that it might be forestalled by revolution.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE INTRANSIGENCE OF SEX

In October, 1905, an incident occurred whose significance was little appreciated at the time, but was destined to prove the *casus belli* in a happily unique form of conflict. The Conservative Government was visibly tottering towards its fall, and Sir Edward Grey, who was marked out for high office in the now inevitable Liberal Government, was expounding the policy of his party in his usual style of dignified restraint. All proceeded with the expected decorum until question-time, when two young women in the audience arose to ask what the policy of a Liberal Government would be on the question of votes for women. To this seemingly legitimate query no answer was condescended. One of the two then jumped on a chair to repeat the question, and at the same time unfurled a little cotton banner with the device "Votes for Women". She was dragged down amid an angry hubbub, and though her companion repeated the question, still no notice was taken. A good-natured Chief Constable tried to smooth matters over by suggesting that the question be sent up in writing to the platform, which was done, but by what seems a strangely impolitic discourtesy, still no notice was taken, and Sir Edward—who, by the way, was himself a believer in women's suffrage—rose to reply to a vote of thanks. His questioners, who refused to be thus put to silence, were now man-handled by stewards and policemen, and dragged from the hall. One of them, a young law-student called Christabel Pankhurst, finding her

arms pinioned, spat—though not, as her sister records, in a very realistic manner<sup>1</sup>—at an inspector, an action that, apparently to her surprise, was considered unladylike. And while Sir Edward was giving a tardy explanation of his reticence . . . not a party matter . . . the two irrepressibles were achieving arrest by haranguing the crowd outside. In default of paying the trifling fines imposed, they elected to go to prison, and there they were treated as if they had been the lowest of criminals. The press was frankly contemptuous, and the general verdict was “serve them right.”

It is a counsel of worldly no less than of heavenly wisdom to agree with your adversary quickly while you are in the way with him—and quicker still while you are in the way with her. To treat women who asked for a vote with open contempt and violence was to fan a long-smouldering grievance into a flame of revolt.

That remark of Sir Edward Grey's about the vote not being a party matter did, in fact, put the grievance in a nutshell. The high hopes aroused in the early seventies of a concession of the franchise to women had been utterly disappointed, and in a way that must have seemed peculiarly cruel, since, by the time Gladstone's Reform Bill was introduced in 1884, a majority of Members of Parliament were definitely pledged to the principle. But Gladstone, that man of strange inconsistencies, happened to be just as unfriendly to the rights of women as he was to those of Egyptians. And once he had decided to keep the women out of his Bill, his followers, to the number of over a hundred, repudiated their pledges with the most complacent cynicism. They had, in fact, never harboured the least serious intention of being bound by them. They had promised the vote as a nurse might promise a fretful child the moon, to put it in a good temper.

<sup>1</sup> *The Suffragette Movement*, by Sylvia Pankhurst, p. 189.

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Feeling in both parties was too divided and lukewarm on the subject for it to have any chance of becoming practical politics. And there the matter rested, and seemed likely to rest, till Doomsday.

That a Tory Government should refuse to interest itself in the proposal was by no means surprising. The Tory does not start from the rights of men or women in the abstract, but from a desire to get the country governed in the best possible way, and it might be argued, with consistency, that to flood the franchise with women was neither good for the nation at large nor for the women themselves. But it is difficult to see on what grounds a Liberal, to whom political freedom is a sacred thing in itself, can deny it to one half of the population, unless, indeed, on the Mohammedan assumption that the charming creatures are not possessed of souls.

As a matter of fact, even in the *fin de siècle*, the emancipation of women in other directions had not progressed far enough to impart the necessary driving force to the agitation for the vote. The immense majority of women were still of the home, womanly. Even such distinguished members of the sex as Mrs. Humphry Ward and Mrs. Sidney Webb publicly proclaimed their belief that the emancipating process had reached the limits imposed by the physical constitution of women.<sup>1</sup> Queen Victoria would have liked to see ladies who agitated for the suffrage whipped—a curious attitude in one of the most masterful of English Sovereigns.

But in the Edwardian period, the emancipation of women was proceeding with giant strides. The argument about physical constitution was less obvious, if not necessarily less cogent, now that women were taking to sport in good earnest, blossoming out into golf and tennis champions, and riding in point-to-points. The ties of home and chaperonage were

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *The Cause* by Ray Strachey, p. 285.

ceasing to bind now that girls could get about all over the country on their bicycles, and the better off among them were driving their own, or their parents', cars. A new type of suburban young woman, greedy for life and crudely rebellious, was depicted by Mr. Wells in his *Ann Veronica*.

The evidence of feminine dress is significant of the direction in which things were tending. The Victorian era had been one that, throughout all its changing fashions, had recklessly sacrificed health and freedom to the cause of sexual selection. Chinese ladies, who crushed their feet, had done themselves less violence than their European sisters, who had jammed the most vital portions of their anatomy into steel frames. Emancipation in a crinoline or a bustle was almost a contradiction in terms.

It was in the nineties that the first signs of a new era began to be apparent. It is true that girls still prided themselves on their wasp waists and wore skirts that scraped up for home consumption a street dust still largely composed of horse-droppings. But the influence of sport and the bicycle were now beginning to tell. The crinoline and bustle were gone for ever, and a new era was inaugurated by the adoption of the skirt and blouse principle. There was even a tendency for costumes to become aggressively masculine, though by what seems a feminine instinct for selecting the most inconvenient parts of men's attire, the uncomfortable straw hat and the throat-constricting collar, with a stiffening of whale-bone, came into vogue.

In the early years of Edward VII's reign it seemed as if the object of fashion were to adorn an orgy of plutocratic extravagance. Not even in the nineties had dresses carried such flamboyant ornamentation. It was the era of the Gibson girl, a magnificent animal, frankly sensuous and without the least pretence of the old Victorian bashfulness. Corsets were becom-

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ing less ferocious, materials less stiff, and the opportunities for unhampered exercise more numerous. A new feature of costume in the twentieth century was its adaptability. The dress was suited to the occasion, and while that for "best" or ceremonial wear clung to its Victorian femininity, that for sport or outdoor exercise showed a progressive advance towards freedom of movement.

From about 1907 onwards, the new-born emancipation of Woman began to be unmistakably expressed in her clothes, despite the naturally reactionary bias of the fashion designers. The simple and straight lines of the classical style that had prevailed in the early nineteenth century, perhaps the most graceful of all English modes, made a brief reappearance, and the neck was freed from its garotte—in fact the ladies had here a distinct advantage over their menfolk, who merely mitigated the tyranny of their own collars by lowering and occasionally softening them. Following on the Grecian came the Oriental influence, largely the result of the Russian ballet, and indeed, shortly before the War the London streets were enlivened by a procession of hired women dressed in baggy silk trousers called harem skirts. But this last effort was a little too advanced even for the twentieth century, and though Eve might, for a brief moment, borrow his pannier from the donkey, she drew a firm line at the breeches of Adam.

There was, indeed, a vogue of what was known as the hobble skirt, a garment that was held up to copious ridicule in the comic papers, where it will be seen depicted so tight that any lady who wanted to catch a train would have had to proceed, like the Devil through Athlone, by standin' leps. This is to judge a fashion by the few vulgar people who attract attention by exaggerating it. The ordinary hobble skirt was by no means without its advantages, for while it restricted movement very little, it was,

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beyond precedent, light, and comparatively short. And it was itself transitional, for before the War it was reinforced by a short overskirt, of which the pannier was an exaggeration, and finally, during the War, was scrapped altogether, leaving the overskirt to develop into the short skirt of post-War emancipation.

In function, Woman was advancing even farther than in dress. In the early twentieth century the Victorian taboo on any paid work but governessing and nursing as unladylike had ceased to bind. Young women from the suburbs were beginning to flood the hitherto closed precincts of the City. The invention of the typewriter created a scope for feminine office work. It was a strange sort of emancipation, considering that most of the work apportioned to women in offices was a mechanical routine that afforded incomparably less variety or scope for the imagination than the business of running a home. It was not from among office girls that successors to the Brontës and Jane Austen were destined to arise. But a sense of independence was no doubt stimulated.

Everywhere women were invading fields hitherto the monopoly of men. Local government was thrown open to them, both as voters and as representatives. They were entitled to degrees at the Universities—Cambridge remaining a last stronghold of male privilege. Women magistrates and women mayors had made their appearance by the time of the War. It was obviously but a matter of time before the last barriers of sex disability were destined to be thrown down.

And yet, as far as Parliament was concerned, the situation seemed to be one of permanent deadlock. The woman who wanted a vote, and had heard her M.P. blandly declare himself in favour of giving it, might have been excused for coming to the con-

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clusion that she had as much chance of getting chocolate from an empty slot machine as of obtaining redress of her grievances from the Mother of Parliaments. The matter was one that cut across the ordinary lines of party division, and passions were strong enough to make it impossible for any Women's Suffrage measure to be included in a ministerial programme without splitting the Cabinet and dividing the party against itself. As in Gladstone's day, there were not lacking Members who gave lip homage to the principle, in the consciousness that any measure in which it was embodied was sure to be talked out or blocked. Last, but not least in importance, Mr. Asquith, soon to become Liberal Prime Minister, was among the most determined opponents of the women's claim to equal citizenship.

So it came about that even a Liberal Government could only inscribe "full speed ahead" upon its banners, with a saving proviso that Liberal principles did not apply to women.

There were, however, two things that the politicians, who imagined that the suffrage question could be shelved indefinitely, had not taken into account—one was the spirit of the times, that could inspire Eve no less than Adam, the other its embodiment in the Pankhurst family.

Emmeline Pankhurst was the widow of a Lancashire barrister of what, for his time, had been very advanced views, and who had been a determined advocate of women's rights. She herself had developed a passion, and something of a genius, for political agitation, which she had been able to communicate to her three daughters, and most of all to the eldest, Miss Christabel, of whom, according to the second daughter, Miss Sylvia, in what is likely to be the classic history of the Suffragette movement, the mother was wont to say, "We are politicians, Christabel and I. Christabel is a politician born!"

in the sense that she would never, like most women, be deflected from her purpose in life by her affections.<sup>1</sup>

Agitation was, in fact, almost a necessity of life to temperaments so constituted. One of the many revealing incidents in Miss Sylvia's singularly candid account is where Mrs. Pankhurst, in 1906, had come from Manchester with the express intention of creating a disturbance in the House of Commons, and having been persuaded with difficulty from carrying it out, wept bitter tears, like a child denied some promised treat. "You have balked me—both of you! I thought there would have been one little niche in the temple of fame for me!"<sup>2</sup> Eight years later, when militancy and martyrdom were at their height, we find Miss Christabel writing,

"The militants will rejoice when victory comes . . . and yet, mixed with their joy will be regret that the most glorious chapter in women's history is closed and the militant fight is over—over, while so many have not yet known the exaltation, the rapture of battle."<sup>3</sup>

Or as Nietzsche might have put it, the Pankhurst gospel was hardly so much that a good cause sanctified militancy, as that a good militancy sanctified the cause.

That this is no distorted estimate is plain from what happened as soon as the outbreak of the War compelled even the Pankhursts to turn their energies into other channels than that of agitation for the vote. The W.S.P.U., their own militant organization, now become patriotic, "rushed," as Miss Sylvia puts it, "to a furious extreme, its Chauvinism unexampled amongst all the other women's societies."<sup>4</sup> Mrs. Pankhurst and her eldest daughter were now agitating for the war to be carried on with the most uncompromising ruthlessness, and in fact, Miss Christabel's organ, *Britannia*, rose to such ultra-patriotic tantrums

<sup>1</sup> *The Suffragette Movement*, by Sylvia Pankhurst, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 587.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 593.



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as to bring upon it the attentions of the police. The second daughter discovered a cause fit to be sanctified by the good militancy, not in Chauvinism, but in Communism.

It would be less than the truth to liken the tactics of the Pankhursts to those of Parnell. Even the Uncrowned King, being a man, was not capable of abandoning himself so unreservedly to the quest of All or Nothing. Even he was not so utterly incapable of compromise or half-measures. And it is hardly conceivable that he would have not only given his body to be tortured, with sickening reiteration, as part of his plan of campaign, but have inspired the whole body of his followers to offer themselves for such an ordeal as the merest matter of course. For when Woman is possessed by the spirit of intransigence, she yields to it, as lover or criminal, in self-sacrifice as in absence of scruple, with a logical consistency quite beyond the scope of the male.

Militancy was in the air ; it was driving the world to suicide ; but there was something about this female militancy that makes it differ from the rest as alcohol differs from wine. The suffragette agitation, that special creation of the Pankhursts, may have been comparatively insignificant in its results—it is at least doubtful whether it hastened by a day the concession of the vote—but as a sign of the times its importance can hardly be over-estimated. The male militancies went about clothed in diplomatic forms and sentimental rhetoric, but this flaunted itself naked in all its unreasoning and uncompromising ruthlessness. These women would have the vote, have it on their own terms, dare everything, stick at nothing, to get it. Every other consideration should be subordinated to this one end, and not only foes, but even friends who did not go to the uttermost extreme of their own intransigence, should be crushed without mercy.

Such was the force that the delays and shifts of the politicians had called into being. For even the Pankhursts would never have got a start for their campaign unless they had had a genuine grievance to work upon. Whether the vote was a good thing or not, nothing could excuse the way in which it was conceded in principle but denied in practice. Still less was any valid defence capable of being put up for the arrogant and even brutal way in which women, who petitioned for citizenship, were suppressed as a nuisance. It should go hard, but the women would better the instruction of the politicians.

The W.S.P.U. was already in being when Miss Christabel Pankhurst had been flung out of Sir Edward Grey's meeting and into prison, so that she and her mother had already an instrument with which to carry on the war that the Liberal stewards had begun. From that moment, till the outbreak of an even greater war, they never looked back or deviated one hair's-breadth from the principle of Clausewitz, that war is an act of violence to compel our opponent to fulfil our will, violence without ruth or limit, but applied by them with a quite un-Clausewitzian finesse.

For the Pankhursts were past-mistresses in the essentially modern art of advertisement. Violence, to be of use, must be spectacular. A noble army of martyrs required the support—eagerly conceded—of a less obviously noble band of photographers and reporters. Riot, or even crime, must be carefully thought out in advance with a view to its publicity value. The suffragette must be perpetually stunting the Cause—chalking on the pavement, chaining herself to grilles and railings, hurling herself to death under the hooves of a horse, no ordinary horse, but the King's horse, at the Derby—this last an unauthorized effort promptly turned to account by a spectacular funeral. All was grist that came to the advertising mill.

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The violence of the suffragettes was cumulative. It was their plan of campaign to allow the politicians to fill the cup of their grievances, before their own ruthless counter-offensive was launched. At first their attitude was that of citizens deprived of their just rights, and agitating for redress. Like the widow in the parable, they would keep on petitioning the unjust judge in season and out of season. They refused to take "No" for an answer, and still more did they refuse to be put off with no answer at all. Undeterred by the fate of Miss Christabel and her comrade, they began to make themselves a thorough, and a calculated, nuisance at political meetings. When the Prime Minister refused to see them, they encamped on his doorstep. When Members of Parliament began to talk and laugh out the Women's Suffrage motion, in the time-honoured way, they protested shrilly from the gallery, and were found to have chained themselves to the invidious grille behind which lady spectators were compelled to sit. When they were forbidden to present a petition to the Commons, they tried to force their way through a cordon of police, and persisted in their efforts until they got taken into custody. In all this they were playing skilfully for the sympathy of a public that, though it might be shocked at their unwomanliness, rather admired their pluck.

As the Pankhursts had no doubt anticipated, the politicians played straight into their hands. They made the fatal mistake of despising their opponents, and showed that, like the Bourbons, they had learnt nothing and forgotten nothing. Suffragettes continued to be flung out of meetings, and when, in default of paying fines, they went to prison, they were denied the privileges of political offenders, and their martyrdom, which lost nothing in the telling, was advertised with consummate skill. It was not the only thing that was advertised, for the light of

publicity was at last thrown upon the cynical expedients by which Parliament had contrived to shelve the whole business of the suffrage. A plain "No" would have been more honest than the putting up of some licensed bore to orate until it was too late to take an honest vote. As an alternative to severity, members and ministers would try to put the ladies in a good temper by a pose of sympathy, of the kind that had been so freely volunteered for decades. The Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, all smiles and geniality, received a deputation of suffragettes, professed his entire sympathy with their cause, explained how impossible it was for him to take any official action about it, and innocently suggested that they should go on pestering. He little dreamed how literally his advice was destined to be taken!

The Pankhurst plan had the simplicity of genius. All depended on one single assumption, namely that, whatever happened, the Government would never dare to allow any suffragette to die on its hands in jail. Granted that, it would be possible for a mere handful of women, under autocratic control, who were ready to suffer everything and stick at nothing, to create such a reign of terror and misrule as would force ministers and public to concede their demands as the only way of ending an intolerable situation. The law they could set at defiance—it might torture them, but it could not suppress them.

They had calculated, and calculated rightly, on being able to command a kind of passive heroism peculiarly feminine. Before the prison doors should fly open, a prolonged agony might have to be endured that to most men would be more bitter than death itself, and this ordeal might have to be faced again and again. But no less cheerfully than women incur the pains of childbirth, did these termagant enthusiasts volunteer again and again for martyrdom. Few indeed were there who hung back or were afraid.

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It soon became apparent that the suffragettes intended to place themselves completely above the law. At first they contented themselves with refusing to be fined or bound over, and treating the courts, as they had treated the police, with contemptuous defiance. Then the method of the hunger strike was evolved. The women would refuse food in prison, and give the authorities the choice between letting them out and seeing them starve to death. As the second alternative was ruled out, it seemed to follow that no sentence of imprisonment could last for more than a few days, and that a suffragette who did not object to this somewhat drastic method of slimming was free to commit practically any crime she pleased.

But the authorities were not yet disposed to admit themselves checkmated. As the suffragette outrageousness increased and feeling grew more bitter, it was resolved that if the prisoners would not take their food, it should be administered to them by force, through a tube. There was nothing in this operation that need have been more than uncomfortable—one of the successive Home Secretaries, Mr. Herbert Gladstone, actually submitted to it—provided only that the victim remained passive. But this was just what the suffragettes made it a point of honour to refuse, and by their own struggles they could turn it into an unspeakably painful and disgusting assault, which might, if repeated often enough, leave the victim a bodily and even a mental wreck. These grim happenings, which were accorded full publicity, were too much for the refined sensibilities of a public that, if it tolerated cruelty, at least insisted that it should not, as in a tougher age, be obtruded on its notice. Except for a minority of Sadists, it was not pleasant to think of girls and matrons being tortured—or even torturing themselves—on a point of principle.

And yet, what were the unfortunate ministers to do? They were certainly not of the stuff of which tyrants are made, and if the ladies had only consented to show the remotest glimmering of a compromising spirit, would have been only too glad to end the nuisance by bidding them go away and sin no more. But it was part of the Pankhurst plan that there should be no escape short of absolute surrender. And for surrender the ministers were not prepared. Apart from the fact that to yield would have meant splitting the party, the humiliation of having been publicly henpecked into submission would have been too intolerable, and the Pankhursts were not the women to refrain from rubbing it in. The very violence of suffragette methods was having the effect of stiffening up the masculine will to resist. And Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's successor in the premiership, Mr. Asquith, was about the most unfortunate choice, from the suffragette point of view, that could have been made, for though a professed Liberal, he was not only opposed to their claims, but combined a native obstinacy with all a lawyer's skill in the avoidance of being cornered.

But what could he or any man do to break this amazing determination, short of grasping the nettle and making it clear that the King's ministers were determined to maintain his laws, and that if any rebel pushed defiance to the point of suicide, die she must, and her blood be on her own head? But it was by no means certain that death would do any more than torture to discourage these women . . . the prospect of victim after victim slowly starving was not to be envisaged. And so, at last, a Cat and Mouse Bill was passed, empowering the authorities to let out hunger strikers and take them back to prison, as soon as they had recuperated, for another bout of starvation or forcible feeding. But the comparatively small band of militant suffragettes displayed a capacity

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for endurance that rose superior even to this ordeal. The "mice" were no sooner out of prison than they started to commit fresh and worse outrages. The alternative was presented, more sharply than ever, of a martyr's death for the suffragettes or surrender for the ministers.

But still, beyond the fact that Votes for Women had now been stunted into a political issue of the first importance, there was nothing tangible to show for all this amazing campaign. The politicians, like Pharaoh, hardened their hearts with each successive plague. The 1906 Parliament passed without anything being done. In the short-lived Parliament elected in January, 1910, a Conciliation Bill indeed passed its second reading by a substantial majority, but the indomitable Asquith took care that it should not get the necessary facilities for passing into law. In the next year, another Parliament gave a second reading to the same Bill by an even bigger majority, but with precisely the same result, and in 1912 it executed a complete *volte face* and threw out the Bill by a majority of 14. Meanwhile, a Reform Bill had been promised on the basis of an extended male franchise, with the proviso that a free vote might be taken on the question of its extension to women, but when, in 1913, this amendment came to be moved, the Speaker, to the surprise of everybody and the consternation of many, ruled it out of order, with the effect of wrecking the entire Bill.

Thus the suffragettes found themselves, in spite of all their efforts, completely baffled, and baffled by the same maddening devices that had held up their cause for so many years. This had the effect of making them throw the last vestiges of restraint to the winds. The W.S.P.U. had hitherto been under the joint control of the Pankhursts, mother and eldest daughter, and the Pethick Lawrences, husband and wife. But even the Pethick Lawrences were

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not prepared to go to all lengths, and so the Pankhursts were left in undisputed control of the campaign during the last two hectic years before the War. Their followers now transformed themselves into a band of furies, determined to terrorize the country into surrender by doing all the mischief within their power. Senseless and cruel mischief much of it was. One device, capable of inflicting untold suffering on innocent people, was the attempt, happily seldom crowned with success, to destroy letters in pillar boxes. Another was the disorganization of the fire-fighting services by the giving of false alarms. The lust for destruction, characteristic of the time, was glutted to the full. Nothing was spared. Women went about with hammers in their muffs to smash the windows of inoffensive tradesmen; *petroleuses* crept about the country under cover of night to fire unoccupied houses. Rick-burning, formerly punishable by death, came back into fashion. Every sort of public building or sports pavilion was liable to attack. There were pathetic scenes, as when one poor woman, whose means of livelihood had been destroyed by the burning of a tea pavilion, wept in court, unpitied by the champions of her sex. Nothing was sacred, not even works of art—one woman did her best to destroy the Rokeby Venus—not historic relics, for an attempt was made to blow up the Coronation Chair at Westminster. God's House was no more revered than those of His creatures—churches were burnt down, and sacrilege piled on arson.

No considerations of justice or charity restrained these furies in their treatment of individuals. Cabinet Ministers, even those who were favourable to the cause, were dealt with as if they were noxious animals, to be attacked at sight. A hatchet was thrown into Mr. Asquith's carriage; Mr. Harcourt's house was set on fire; Mr. Birrell was mobbed in St. James's



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Park and badly mauled ; Mr. Churchill was attacked by a male supporter with a whip. One poor doctor, whose unwelcome duty it had been to administer the forcible feeding, and who had admittedly performed it with all possible humanity, was savagely attacked with a sjambok. Even the King was not exempt ; he was pestered and insulted, and could not go to the theatre without the performance being interrupted by cries of " You Russian Tsar ! "—a view of his functions that perhaps accounts for the additional cry of " Give women the vote ! " Miss Christabel having decided that " the royal name and office " were " dishonoured ", the unfortunate Monarch was sentenced to receive the treatment of a Cabinet Minister.<sup>1</sup>

By this time the suffragette autocracy had begun to be exercised with an arrogance that even the most intransigent of potentates or conquerors could hardly have equalled. Miss Christabel, directing the movement from her safe headquarters at Paris, while her mother endured a ghastly succession of hunger strikes, proclaimed that the W.S.P.U. was not even prepared to receive communications from Ministers, and that militancy—which was now a euphemism for organized crime—would go on until the desired Bill, having passed the Lords, had become an Act of Parliament :

" No militant will believe a single word that the Government may say. No militant will trust a single promise that the Government may make. Then down with negotiations ! " <sup>2</sup>

Substituting " Germans " or " Allies " for " Government ", this would have served—though with hardly quite such naked brutality—to have expressed the spirit of any one of the militant patriotisms during the now imminent World-suicide.

<sup>1</sup> S. Pankhurst, *op. cit.*, p. 554.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 584.

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It was the war workers, and not the suffragettes, who at last made the granting of the vote inevitable, and when it did come, it made little appreciable difference to anybody except the leaders themselves, who, having secured their niche in history, found their occupation gone, and the fickle limelight directed elsewhere.

## CHAPTER V

### IRELAND—THE BARGAIN

Napoleon is said to have ascribed his ruin to the Spanish ulcer. It might have been said, with even more obvious cogency, that the Irish ulcer was the ruin of the English Parliamentary system. Gladstone's word picture of Ireland standing suppliant at the Bar, and imploring for her freedom, shows how little he had grasped of the real case for Home Rule. The gift, when it did come, was thrust upon Ireland by a distracted and exhausted England, only too glad to rescind that fatal Union on any terms that she could obtain. It would have been well for her could she have anticipated that freedom by a good half-century.

More effectively than the suffragettes had Ireland played the part of Israel to the British Pharaoh. So long as John Bull hardened his heart, and would not let his neighbour go, so long had he continued to be plagued. The prestige and worth of Parliament had suffered irreparable injury from the wrecking tactics of Parnellism. The great Liberal Party had been torn asunder and condemned to twenty years of impotence from its failure to grapple successfully with the Irish problem. Worse was to come—it was to sell its soul, and to the consequence of such a bargain no time limit is fixed.

John Bull was less fortunate than Pharaoh, for that monarch had got a fairly united Israel to deal with, and his letting one nation go would not have involved the driving out and enslavement of another. But it was the crux of the Irish problem that Ireland was not one nation but two, and that the Protestants of

the North-East were one of the most fiercely self-conscious communities in the world, invincibly determined that under no circumstances whatever would they submit to the yoke of a Catholic majority whom they hated with all the unbending intolerance of Calvinism, and whom the traditions of a ruling caste had taught them to despise. Gladstone might have been excused for forgetting Ulster in 1886, for he was, in Lord Randolph's brutal phrase, an old man in a hurry, and Ulster had not had time to show her hand. But now only a blindness so wilful as to be little short of criminal could ignore the fact that no Government could impose Home Rule upon a United Ireland, without undertaking the conquest of the Protestants by force of arms—no ordinary conquest, like that of Poland or Egypt, but the employment of British troops to drive men who professed allegiance to the Crown, and would fight under the Union Jack, under the yoke of England's avowed enemies, men who had but recently shocked the Commons by their vociferous cheers for the news of a British disaster and the capture of a British general.

The Ulster Protestants were not exactly ideal candidates for the rôle of the lamb in the fable. They were inheritors of a bitter and intolerant tradition, and for any freedom except their own they had no hankerings whatever. Their attitude to their Catholic neighbours was expressed in the good old Orange refrain, "Croppies, lie down!" and in fact there was an exuberance and ingenuity of offensiveness in their songs and toasts that it would take an Irishman not only to invent but to appreciate. What a world of religious and patriotic insult is packed into four words—to be sung on the anniversary of the Boyne—

Slitter slaughter! <sup>1</sup>  
Holy water!

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<sup>1</sup> The correct spelling, I believe, is "slither slather".

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and what a toast of genius is that to the memory of William III (not forgetting Oliver Cromwell), one of the mildest of whose passages runs :

“ And may all the Croppies be rammed, slammed, jammed and damned into the great gun that is in Athlone, and may I be standing by with a lighted torch to blow them in innumerable fragments over the Hill of Blastation. . . .”

The conclusion that might have been drawn from these and similar outpourings was that it would be stark madness to endeavour to force people so minded under the heel of an Irish Parliament with a permanent Catholic majority. It was certainly in glaring defiance of the most elementary dictates of Liberalism, whose very name is freedom, and one of whose corner-stones is the principle of National self-determination. To tell the Protestants that they must accept a servitude quite as repellent to them as a negro supremacy would be to Virginians or Georgians, simply because a composite majority of a British Lower Chamber had been whipped up three times to legalize it, and that, in case they refused, they would be treated as rebels, was to read the Liberal Pater-noster backwards, and to inscribe on the banner of freedom the motto of George III, “ Rebels must be made to obey.” A middle party, with only its principles to depend upon, that is guilty of such apostasy, can hardly avoid signing its own death-warrant.

For a party Liberal in nature as well as in name, the Irish problem presented a supreme opportunity for statesmanship. To give freedom to the Catholics without taking it away from the Protestants was a task of infinite delicacy. There was overlapping of boundaries ; there were minorities within minorities ; if there were two nations in Ireland, there were also two imperialisms, Orange and Green, neither of which would be content with less than the whole island. Only with liberty as a goal, and unswerving impar-

tiality as a guiding principle, could complexities so formidable have been straightened out.

But an impartial solution was no longer practical politics. Liberalism itself had ceased to be free. The two elections of 1910 had produced that fatal situation that the Act of Union was from time to time bound to produce, in which the Irish held the balance between the two English parties. They had only to vote according to their convictions on the Budget, and the triumph over the Lords, which the Liberals now had in sight, would be exchanged for one of the most humiliating fiascos in political history. And for more than a year after the passing of the Budget, John Redmond, by his mere fiat, could have presented victory to Lord Willoughby de Broke and his Diehards.

There was never a less appropriate candidate for the rôle of tempter than this singularly attractive Irish gentleman. He had, in his nature, none of the cold steel of his lost leader, Parnell. He was more of a lovable than a great figure. But as Irish leader he had no choice. He must sell his support at a price, and that price, as every Irishman knew, was an undivided Ireland. In other words, the Protestants must be forced under the yoke of a Dublin Parliament—nothing less could be nominated in the bond. Unless the Protestants bowed obediently to that yoke—and the Boyne was more likely to flow back to its source—a Liberal Government, with British bullets and bayonets as its final argument, must be prepared to make rebels obey.

In what form the bargain was concluded, whether it was ever formulated in set terms or merely took the form of an honourable understanding, is a matter on which no certain light can as yet be thrown. But that the Irish, when they voted for the Budget and the Parliament Act, did so in the assurance that the price should be paid, there can be no doubt what-

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ever. They held the best of all guarantees for fulfilment in their power to hurl the Government from office at any moment they chose. That the Liberal Party chiefs seriously faced up to the prospect of conquering the Protestants is less than probable. Sufficient to the day was this business of the Lords; the morrow could take thought for the things of itself. No doubt things would work out somehow right. There might be riots in Belfast, not unprecedented but a little worse than usual . . . a few score broken heads, perhaps a death or two—but civil war . . . the idea was too preposterous in the twentieth century! Perhaps, if the worst came to the worst, the Nationalists could be bilked.

Formally or not, the pact was concluded. The Irishmen swallowed the bitter pill of the Budget, and tramped with a goodwill through the lobbies to settle accounts with their old enemies, the Lords. The next year, 1912, the Liberals duly prepared to honour their side of the bargain, and bring in a Bill subjecting Ireland to a Catholic majority in time to secure the benefit of the Parliament Act.

We must now take a brief retrospective glance at the progress of Ireland since the collapse of Gladstone's second attempt to carry his project of Home Rule. The avowed intention of the Unionists was to maintain firm order, and at the same time to kill Home Rule by kindness. It was their theory that the Nationalist agitation only throve on economic misery, and that a prosperous Ireland would be a contented Ireland. Accordingly they did everything they could to push forward a constructive policy of reform within the limits of the Union. The great standing grievance of an alien garrison of landlords was marked out for removal. First a generous measure of local self-government was conceded, and then, by that romantic Adonis, George Wyndham, Mr. Balfour's Irish Secretary, a Bill was brought in to buy out the

landlords by a State-aided system of land purchase, and to put the Irish small farmer in possession of Irish soil. The bottom dog of all, the hired labourer, was by no means always a gainer by having exchanged Squire Log as a master for Farmer O'Stork, but for all that, it was perhaps the wisest and most successful contribution that English statesmanship had as yet made towards the betterment of Ireland. At the same time the co-operative movement, fathered by Sir Horace Plunkett, was doing wonders to bring prosperity to the Irish countryside. The end of the Unionist regime saw Ireland in the enjoyment of a measure of tranquillity that would have been unbelievable in the eighties, and of a visibly increasing prosperity.

Unfortunately the idea that Ireland, or any other nation, will cease to be patriotic merely because it is well off, is a materialist illusion characteristic of the modern age. England, with her experience of Indian and Egyptian nationalism, ought to have known that it is just when men wax fattest that they are most inclined to kick against an alien domination. What the Unionists had, in fact, done, was to pave the way for Home Rule and render it inevitable. Wyndham himself was half-conscious of this necessity, for he lent an ear to his Under-Secretary, Sir Anthony Macdonnell, and Lord Dunraven, who had already helped him devise his scheme of Land Purchase, and now wished to follow it up by entrusting certain limited powers of administration to an Irish assembly—rather a glorified County Council than a Parliament. But at the very rumour of such an innovation, the spirit of intransigence was aroused. The Protestants were instantly up in arms. In the inclusion of the North-East they saw the thin edge of the wedge of conquest. Poor Wyndham, who had committed himself less deeply to the proposal than was imagined at the time, found his position impossible and had to



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resign. The Nationalists, for their part, proved equally uncompromising when, in 1907, the Liberal Government tried to produce such a measure as the Protestants had anathematized. For both sides, it was evidently all or nothing, a fact that ought to have been a warning to the politicians.

So far from being killed by kindness, the self-consciousness of Irish patriotism had been finding new and significant expression in literature. The Irish language, which had almost died out among the people, was studied and—as far as might be—revived, though no amount of schooling was ever likely to bring it back into common use. The ancient Celtic legends were rediscovered, and Mr. W. B. Yeats became the founder of a new school of Irish poetry and drama. As in the days of Grattan's Parliament, Dublin became a centre of culture, the heaven for a galaxy of stars. But it was a highly romanticized twilight that these first revivalists peopled with the creatures of their imagination. Mr. Yeats was more of an English Romantic than a Celt—the cloud shadows among which he loved to move were those of Shelley, and as a technician he owed not a little to Rossetti.

The authentic spirit of modern Ireland could never be captured by one who averted his eyes in horror from

All things uncomely and broken,  
All things worn out and old.

This was reserved for the sombre and ruthless genius of J. M. Synge, who burnt out the brief flame of his life among peasants and vagrants, and who shrank from nothing. The sensitive patriotism of Dublin was outraged when the Abbey Theatre staged a play—a consummate work of art—of which the whole point is the spontaneous hero-worship accorded by the population of an Irish village to a wandering

youth who pretends that he has killed his father. It was the merest cant to explain away the whole affair as one of art for art's sake. With visionary insight, Synge had divined how deeply the iron of past oppression had entered the Irish soul. Another visionary, an unfrocked priest of Mr. Shaw's creation, could cry out, in the bitterness of his soul, that Ireland was hell. But it was a hell, an Irishman might have added, whose fires England had kindled, and might yet set her own house in a blaze.

The Liberal Government of 1906, with its vast majority, was delighted to be free from the troublesome necessity of paying for its existence by a Home Rule Bill. That cause was notoriously unpopular with the electorate of the larger island, and excited little spontaneous enthusiasm in the ranks of the party. The last Liberal Prime Minister, Lord Rosebery, had gone so far as to disavow it openly. But though the Irish were, for the nonce, impotent—and Mr. Redmond was not the man to revive Parnell's tactics of obstruction—it was advisable to do everything possible to keep them in a good humour. The choice of Mr. Birrell for the Irish Secretaryship was no doubt inspired by the belief that his reputation as a humorist would endear him to what John Bull knew of the Irish soul.

Mr. Birrell set himself, with his expected geniality, to reverse the policy of the Unionists. There was to be no more coercion, the law was to be allowed to function as it did in England. This, in a country where the law meant Dublin Castle, and the whole population was in league against it, was at least a dangerous experiment. It is not to be wondered at that there was a widespread revival of agrarian crime, and that the practice—often revoltingly cruel—of cattle-driving flourished with impunity. The romantic soul of Mr. Chesterton burst into song when some cattle were stopped at a village bearing the suggestive

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name of Swords. But more dangerous weapons than swords were being encouraged under Mr. Birrell's auspices. For an Act of Mr. Gladstone's Government, passed in 1881, which allowed the authorities to control the importation and sale of arms, was suffered to lapse. Not only Catholics, but Protestants, were now free to provide themselves with what was unhappily the most congenial means of settling Irish differences. Never had dragon's teeth been sowed with such amiable light-heartedness.

Nevertheless, the state of Ireland, at the beginning of 1912, was at least an improvement on the bitter times of Parnell's agitation. Under Mr. Wyndham's Act the land had been rapidly passing from English into Irish hands, and the alien rule at Dublin Castle was more than ever an anomaly. Home Rule, that had come to seem almost a mirage, now appeared a political certainty. The price had been paid, the Lords humbled, and the long-promised Bill was due in the coming session. Nothing could shift the Government, with its hundred and twenty majority, from office, until, by the mere mechanical process of voting, the Bill had been forced into law some time in 1914. The fact was also noted by the Protestants, to whom it seemed that the thing that they had greatly feared was at last about to come upon them.

With what fire the Government was playing might have been apparent from an incident that occurred early in the year. Mr. Winston Churchill, newly transferred from the Home Office to the Admiralty, proposed to come to Belfast and deliver a speech, in favour of Home Rule, in the Ulster Hall. It was Mr. Churchill's own father who had invented the slogan that had now been adopted by the whole Protestant community—"Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right." That the son should come for the express purpose of pleading what the father had thus characterized as a *casus belli* was regarded as an intoler-

able provocation. An abstract love of free speech had no part in the Ulster Protestant mentality. It soon became evident that any attempt to use the Hall for this purpose would set the whole city in an uproar. Nor was the hated minister likely to escape with his life from any attempt to transfer the meeting to some other part of the Protestant quarter. It was finally arranged that he should speak in a marquee on a football ground in the Catholic quarter. Even so, a force of some 4,000 troops had to be imported, at great public expense, to protect Mr. Churchill from the fury of the Protestants. He was mobbed and hooted on his arrival and at his hotel by an enraged mob, and had to escape from the town by a circuitous route. English public opinion, that little understood the fierceness of the passions aroused, was not unnaturally shocked at such methods of controversy, but to any responsible statesman it ought to have been evident that men who could not even tolerate the mention of Home Rule within their confines were not likely to submit, under any circumstances, to the thing itself.

During this month of February, 1912, the Cabinet was anxiously debating on this very question of whether to allow counties with a clear Protestant majority to contract out of the Home Rule Bill. But Asquith had arrived at a solution highly characteristic of his legal mind. He would not embody Exclusion in the Bill, but would keep it in reserve for use as a bargaining counter. The Bill itself must be one for the coercion of the Protestants, but the Nationalist leaders must be warned, in Asquith's own words, that "the Government held themselves free to make changes, if it became clear that special treatment must be provided for the Ulster counties" <sup>1</sup>—a beautifully elastic formula. And so the Bill was drafted and introduced, bristling with qualifications and safe-

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith*, Vol. II, pp. 14-15.

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guards, but simple in one essential respect, that it ignored altogether the separate existence, and denied the freedom of choice, of the Ulster Protestant community. The decree had gone forth : the Protestants must submit, or . . .

It soon became apparent what the alternative was likely to be. Sooner than lie down before the Croppies, the Orangemen—and some of them were quite open about it—would have preferred any alien rule, not excepting that of a Protestant Kaiser. If England were wantonly to cast them off from her allegiance, the cry might yet be raised, “ To thy tents, O Ulster ! Now see to thine own house, Guelph ! ” They were at least enough of Irishmen to harbour undying memories—there should be another siege of Derry and another battle of the Boyne before the Protestant boys would pass beneath the yoke.

They had found a leader of like spirit with themselves. Sir Edward Carson, a Dublin Unionist, was, like Asquith, a barrister, and probably the most powerful advocate at the Bar. But he was a lawyer of a rather unusual type, for part of his very strength as an advocate was derived from a sombre fire of conviction, almost of fanaticism, that never ceased to burn. The greatest of all his triumphs had been his duel with Oscar Wilde, when he had been briefed as counsel for Lord Queensberry in a famous libel action. Then all the light shafts of wit that had set the court in a roar, again and again, at Carson’s expense, broke against the remorseless purpose of a moral crusader, determined to purge Society from the abomination of sin. By that time Carson’s reputation had already been built up as Crown Counsel under Mr. Balfour’s regime of coercion. Here, too, he had pursued one undeviating course with an entire absence of fear or sympathy. The law should be enforced, though Parnell and the Land League should raise all Hell to defeat it. Courage—sheer physical courage—is a

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quality that never fails to command respect in Ireland, and when Carson had calmly walked through the midst of a mob that was waiting to tear him to pieces, not a hand was raised against him. It was by the same instinct that the Protestants realized that in this man, with his heavy, remorseless features, they had found a leader after their own hearts, in whom was no compromise nor shadow of turning.

While Home Rule was being slowly forced through the Commons, passions that had long been smouldering in Ireland burst into flame. A Protestant Sunday School excursion was mobbed by a Hibernian procession, and in revenge the Protestant workers in the Belfast shipyards fell upon their Catholic mates, and drove some two thousand of them out of their jobs. Not only were two Irish nations in being, but they were visibly drifting towards a state of war.

## CHAPTER VI

### IRELAND—THE COVENANT

On Ulster Day, September 28th, an event occurred whose solemnity ought to have impressed the most unimaginative. As the culmination of a series of great meetings, a Solemn League and Covenant was drawn up, which, by November, was destined to obtain 471,414 signatures, 218,206 being men of Ulster.<sup>1</sup> In this document—as signed by the men, the women merely pledging their support—the Covenanters undertook to “use all means that may be found necessary” to defeat the attempt to set up a Home Rule Parliament, and to refuse to recognize such a Parliament if it was set up. Its most remarkable feature, in an age that had long become accustomed to separate religion from politics, was its solemn appeal to “the God whom our fathers, in days of stress and trial, confidently trusted.” This, on the lips of the Protestants, was no empty verbiage. Their God may not have been essentially different from the old Sinai Storm-God—but He was a living God, mighty to save His servants who put their trust in Him. Those who went to Ulster at this time came back with one tune ringing unescapably in their ears—“O God, our help in ages past!” Sir Edward Carson well knew how to appeal to his fellow-Protestants when he publicly branded anyone who should be false to the Covenant with the guilt of the traitor Lundy.

This warning might have been sufficiently dramatic to have given pause to those who proposed the sub-

<sup>1</sup> *Annual Register*, 1912, p. 211.

jugation of the Covenanters. But in the atmosphere that prevailed in England before the War, their instinctive reaction took the form of the laughter that has been likened to the crackling of thorns under pots. The Covenanters, whose sense of humour was not of the strongest, symbolized their will to resist by the display of dummy rifles, and even of wooden cannon. The Government press henceforth could dismiss any suggestion of serious difficulty in enforcing Home Rule with a stock taunt about wooden guns. The Catholics, who knew better, but were no less proficient in the art of insult than the singers of "Boyne Water," ridiculed Carson as the "King of the Bluffers." The mention of civil war was strictly taboo in Home Rule circles—the word invariably employed for any possible resistance to the Bill was "riot", a hole and corner affair, it was suggested, that would easily be put down by the police. Every form of ridicule was lavished on the Covenanters. It was openly flung in their faces that they had no stomach for fighting. The effect on these grim and fanatical, but by no means thin-skinned individuals, can be imagined.

Meanwhile, how was the other great party in the State, Unionist by its very name, reacting to the crisis? In the confusion of principles that prevailed, the Unionists can scarcely be said to have cut a more creditable figure than their opponents. For as surely as the Liberal gospel is one of freedom, so is the Tory tradition wedded to order. Whatever the provocation, it is hard to imagine the Duke of Wellington—let us say—fomenting rebellion as part of a political game. That the Unionists should move heaven and earth to prevent the contemplated outrage on the smaller of the two Irish nations was their manifest duty, but it was none the less their duty to take a wider view than could be expected of the victims themselves. Their leaders knew—none better—that



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the country might at any moment be plunged into the greatest war of its history. Never had the need for national unity been more pressing. The mere threat of civil war might be fraught with terrible consequences; the reality might paralyse Britain's sword arm in the hour of life or death for her Empire.

But the new Unionist leader, Bonar Law, had Ulster blood in his veins, and had superseded Mr. Balfour for the express purpose of gingering up the fighting spirit of the party. That spirit was already quite sufficiently aroused. The Diehards of the county sets were burning to avenge the humiliation of the Parliament Act and to get even with "that fellow Lloyd George," who was now obliterating the memory of the Marconi episode by stumping the country with propaganda of Land Reform. What to them, or to the hard-headed business men of the Tariff Reform campaign, were the liberties of Irishmen? They were out to defeat Home Rule altogether, and to bring down the Government with it.

In this they could claim to be at one with the Covenanters themselves. Sir Edward Carson and his followers scorned to limit their aims to the mere exclusion of the North-East, but were determined that not a single foot of Irish soil should be ruled by an Irish Parliament. Liberty was no more enough for them than it was for the Catholics. The God in whom they trusted to deliver His people would also subdue the heathen under their feet.

Thus, in the controversy that followed, the Unionists, by their indiscriminate championship of Protestant liberty and Protestant ascendancy, actually threw away the strongest part of their case. Just as the Liberals stultified every argument for granting self-government to Catholics by coupling it with the coercion of Protestants, so the Unionists reversed the process, and of the two rival absurdities it would be hard to say which was the more glaring.

The Unionists, then, could hardly claim to be disinterested champions of liberty when, two months, even, before the Covenant was signed, Bonar Law announced that there were no lengths of resistance to which Ulster might go in which she would not be supported by an overwhelming majority of the British People—as plain an incitement as could have been imagined to armed rebellion. And yet, by a significant inconsistency, no one of the Unionist leaders went so far as to take a definite pledge to repeal the Home Rule Act if the party came into power, or even that part of it that referred to the North-East. They so far misconceived the situation as to offer to abandon their championship of the Protestants, if a definite verdict for Home Rule was attained at a General Election, as if the Covenanters would, for a moment, have admitted the right of a British majority to put them under the Catholics !

The session had been prolonged into 1913 before the Bill came up to the Lords. Had that House been really independent, it might have retrieved its reputation for statesmanship by an amendment securing that the Protestants should come in of their own free will, or not at all. Such a compromise, securing justice, and no more than justice, might well have been accepted after a more or less prolonged haggle, to secure a peaceful passage for the rest of the measure. But the Lords, acting as the obedient satellites of the Unionist caucus, decided on unconditional rejection, and the slow process of the Parliament Act was necessary to break down their resistance. This was to give the Covenanters a space of two years in which to organize.

It was soon evident that they meant to take full advantage of this respite. With menacing deliberation, the work of organization went on, and within a year of the signing of the Covenant, the dragon's teeth sowed by the Government had borne fruit in

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a drilled and disciplined army of something like 100,000 men, commanded by a distinguished officer of the regular army, Sir George Richardson. Meanwhile, the Ulster Unionist Council, under the presidency of Sir Edward Carson, had constituted itself a Provisional Government, to take over the administration of the Province on the passing of the Home Rule Bill.

By the autumn of 1913, the alarming nature of the situation could no longer be disguised. The pretence that the Protestants were merely bluffing had worn so thin as to be transparent. The peals of mocking laughter now had an increasingly hollow ring; lips that had curled with scorn were beginning to foam with anger. Instead of bluff and wooden guns, the talk—strange on Liberal lips—was now all of rebels and treason, and of the authority of the State that must be maintained at all costs. These were brave words, but meanwhile a strange paralysis had seized upon those in whom that authority was vested. Here was civil war being openly prepared within the limits of the United Kingdom. Sir Edward—still characterized as King Carson, but without the addition, “of the bluffers”—lost no occasion of proclaiming that the Government was afraid to interfere and did not dare to arrest him. Mr. Asquith’s attitude to the challenge only differed from that of Dogberry in its unruffled dignity—Mr. Will Dyson depicted him as walking along with a grimace of agonized indifference, while his tormentor plastered him with mud. The official reason for this inaction was the unwillingness to add another to the list of Irish martyrs—a point shrewdly insisted upon by Mr. Redmond. It might have been added that it was more than doubtful whether any jury, except one openly packed, could have been induced to brand the most persuasive of all living advocates with the guilt of treason.

Every month of impunity for this new Uncrowned

King and his legions deepened the conviction in Unionist circles that the Government had shown the white feather, and would never dare to undertake the coercion of the Covenanters. It followed that if a sufficiently impressive show of resistance were only offered, the whole Home Rule edifice would collapse and bury the Government beneath its ruins. Civil war, which was a matter of deadly earnest in Ireland, was, in the country houses and villas of England, a new and thrilling game, with just the right spice of vicarious danger. Few people in England, on either side, seriously imagined that it would come to the reality of men shattered and mutilated, of towns stormed, of the King's troops firing on the Union Jack and loyalists on the King's troops. The Irish Secretary, who had been especially witty about the religious squabbles of Ulster, birrelled happily about "our horrible artillery." In a spirit of equal light-heartedness, sympathizers in country houses began preparing to do their bit for Ulster when the clash came. The inevitable Lord Willoughby de Broke, undeterred by his annihilation in the last ditch of the Veto defences, continued his Diehard career with an assurance that if the worst came to the worst Ulster should not stand alone. There was even a little playing at soldiers in parks, and arrangements were made to accommodate the women and children of Covenanters in the field.

An ominous, but almost inevitable feature of the agitation, was that the willingness of the army to serve against the Covenanters was called in question. It is true that Sir Edward Carson furiously repudiated the suggestion that he had ever proposed to tamper with its allegiance, but Mr. Bonar Law could go so far as to say that in case of civil war, the soldiers were "citizens like all the rest of us," and other Unionist leaders hinted, in even plainer terms, that if Mr. Asquith, at the bidding of Mr. Redmond, unloosed

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the Crown forces on those commanded by Sir George Richardson, the army would refuse to fight for him. Its support was at least doubtful, considering the Unionist sympathies of practically the whole body of officers, and the deep unexpressed conviction, not only of the rank and file, but of the country at large, that the political game must in no circumstances be allowed to lapse from words into blows.

Nothing, in fact, is more remarkable, throughout this whole controversy, than the evident refusal of the British public to take the prospect of Civil War or the heroics of the politicians seriously. The bye-elections showed no swing of popular feeling one way or the other. Had the Government gone to the country, as its opponents demanded, it is almost certain that the Industrial North would again have decided that business was business, and voted on the Free Trade issue. The language of war had been applied so constantly to the party conflict, and there had been so persistent an over-emphasis of every trivial controversy, that the ordinary man put this Ulster business on a par with Chinese Slavery, the martyrdom of Nonconformist ratepayers, and the persecution by Disestablishment of the Church in Wales—agreeable thrills of the political picture house, that one could forget at the end of each performance.

Only towards the end of the summer of 1913 did it begin to dawn upon the Government that this was no ordinary political squabble. These intractable Irishmen did not understand the rules of the game as it was played in England. What was to be done with men who, when you proposed to alter their political status, started appealing to God? It was evident that, in Walpole's phrase, this dance would no further go. It was high time that somebody should breathe the word "compromise"—a little arrangement that should placate the Protestants with-

out infuriating the Catholics. Philological experts can inform us whether there is an equivalent to "compromise" in the Irish tongue—to the psychologist it would appear improbable.

As, according to the rules of the game, the least failure to insist upon the whole pound of flesh would be hailed by opponents as an admission of defeat and branded by supporters as treason, it was best that the ice should be broken by a Liberal minister who had lately retired from the hurly-burly, the ex-Lord Chancellor Loreburn, who had earned an honourable name for impartiality by his flat refusal to pack the magisterial Bench with caucus nominees. Lord Loreburn's plea, in the House of Lords, for a settlement by consent, was couched in such dignified and earnest terms that it was at once felt, at least in England, that the whole controversy had been placed upon a new and more reasonable footing.

Next began a phase of feverish manœuvring for position, in which confusion was made worse confounded by the conflicting speeches of ministers. First the Home Secretary scoffed at the whole idea of compromise, and announced that the Bill was going through in the teeth of the Covenanters—next the First Lord, Mr. Winston Churchill, went to the other extreme with language which most people took to be an offer to satisfy the Protestant demand for exclusion. Asquith himself, with his lawyer's instinct for not giving away any point a moment before he had to, put out the most impressive feelers for a settlement in one speech, and then, in another, talked of the duty and power of the State to enforce the law of the land—which came back to a rhetorical version of good old George III's "rebels must be made to obey."

Meanwhile Mr. Redmond, who had boasted of his ability to make Mr. Asquith toe the line, was pouring scalding water on the very idea of compromise.

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The Covenanters were "defeated men trying to cover their retreat," "desperate and dispirited men." Mr. Redmond's language was mild, compared with the ordinary Nationalist way of proclaiming that Ireland should never be partitioned, a word destined, in a not remote future, to be on the lips of all those who wished to deny self-determination to minorities. Nor was the language of Sir Edward Carson much more hopeful, since he plainly implied that mere exclusion would not satisfy his followers, and that the mere existence of a Unionist minority in the Catholic districts made it necessary for the Covenanters to oppose any form of Home Rule whatever.

The crucial question was whether at this eleventh hour the Government would take its inspiration from the Liberalism it still professed, and come out with a clear declaration that the Protestant North-East, like the rest of Ireland, should be free to decide its own destinies. It was not till the second reading of the Home Rule Bill, in March, 1914, that Mr. Asquith formulated a definite proposal, to the effect that any Irish county might vote itself out of the Bill for a period of six years and no more. As a move in the party game, this was masterly, for it had the logical effect of taking the wind out of the Unionists' sails. They had demanded one election—the six years' period would give them the certainty of two, and if they won either, this business of Ulster would be on their hands. And the Government could say to the Nationalists that the principle of a United Ireland was still maintained.

Unfortunately neither of the Irish nations had the faintest idea of submitting its essential liberties to two decisions, or fifty, of the British electorate. It was to God that the Covenanters had appealed, and not to Bonar Law, or even John Bull. With such an annihilating swoop as had made him the terror of witnesses, Sir Edward Carson pounced on Mr.

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Asquith's six years' limit, and branded it as a sentence of death with stay of execution. At the same time Mr. Redmond announced that the proposals represented the extreme limit of concession. It is highly probable that Mr. Asquith had it in mind to keep the removal of the limit in reserve, as a bargaining counter, to be played at the last moment. But for the nonce the deadlock seemed absolute.

There was, however, one member of the Cabinet who had a plan of his own for resolving it. Mr. Winston Churchill had served his apprenticeship as a cavalry officer, and afterwards as a war-correspondent. He was of the lineage of Marlborough, and was as devout a worshipper as Messrs. Chesterton and Belloc of the sword, a weapon that, unlike these gentlemen, he had actually fleshed, in a charge at Omdurman. He had already as Home Secretary been the moving spirit in a spectacular display of military force during the Railway Strike of 1911, and had even staged a pitched battle against a couple of anarchists in an East End house, with Scots Guards sniping at the windows and Horse Artillery thundering through the streets to their support. He was now in charge of the Admiralty, and his colleague at the War Office was Colonel Seely, D.S.O., a gallant and popular gentleman whose genius was perhaps more suited to a life of open-air adventure than to the subtleties of administration.

Less than a week after Mr. Asquith had formulated his proposals for a settlement, Mr. Churchill delivered a speech at Bradford whose tone of open menace contrasted strangely with the conciliatory note he had sounded so short a time ago. There were worse things than bloodshed. The Covenanters were reviving the issue of Marston Moor. There was no lawful measure from which the Government could or would shrink. And Mr. Churchill concluded a flaming peroration with the unmistakable challenge



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“Let us go forward together and put these grave matters to the proof.” This, if it meant anything at all, was a plain announcement that the Government had at last resolved to cut the knot with the sword.

Within a few days it was apparent that the knot held, but that the sword edge was blunted. Mr. Churchill had ordered the Third Battle Squadron of the Fleet to Lamlash, to be within striking distance of Belfast, and the army had meanwhile been ordered to undertake certain precautionary operations in the way of strengthening depots and safeguarding stores in Ulster, a legitimate enough step if the Protestant forces were to be regarded in the light of potential rioters. But against a people in arms, it had the effect of mobilization, or an attempt to secure a winning advantage in the event of hostilities, and this, as events in a wider sphere were soon to prove, was equivalent to an act of war. It was so interpreted by the general on the spot, who instantly took steps to ascertain which of his officers would consent to serve against the Covenanters. In the Cavalry Brigade, where the question was put, it appeared that from the commander downwards, the bulk of them would prefer to resign.

The effect of Mr. Churchill's actions had indeed been to put matters to the proof, and it had been proved to demonstration that the use of the army against the Covenanters was, as Lord Roberts himself had recently declared, unthinkable. In vain did Mr. Asquith try to save the face of his Government by repudiating a naïve assurance of Colonel Seely to the officers, that there was no question of using the army to crush political opposition to the Home Rule Bill. The only effect of this was to drive the War Minister to resignation and—what was more serious—to deprive the War Office of the services of Sir John French, who was already destined to command

the Expeditionary Force in the only too probable event of war with Germany.

An appalling danger had thus been averted, but at a price calculated to appal any but the most reckless of partisans. For the first time, since its desertion of James II, the army had asserted its unwillingness to fight for constituted authority. As on that occasion, its decision was in complete harmony with popular sentiment, for few Englishmen seriously considered the coercion of the Covenanters worth the bones of a single British Tommy. But where was this process of undermining discipline to stop? How far it had gone was not realized at the time, for it was only after his death that it became known how the Director of Military Operations at Whitehall, an Ulsterman, General Wilson, had recently been working out with Bonar Law, Sir Edward Carson, and other Unionist leaders a scheme for forcing the Government's hand by making the Lords refuse to pass the Army Annual Act, without a definite stipulation that the army should not be employed against Ulster. This, if the Government had refused to surrender, would have had the effect of leaving it, and the nation, without an army at all after April 30—and Wilson was hard at work preparing for the life-and-death struggle with Germany, of whose imminence he was firmly convinced. But then, as he put it, "desperate measures are required to save a desperate situation."<sup>1</sup> It would seem as if the gods, when they are weary of human civilization, afflict it with a madness proportionate to the destruction that they have in mind.

The fury of the politicians on both sides knew no bounds, and to fury on the Liberal side was added consternation. But the cup of humiliation was not yet full, for the Covenanters followed up their success,

<sup>1</sup> *Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson*, by Major-General Sir C. E. Callwell, Vol. I, pp. 138-9.

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in the ensuing month, with a triumphant act of defiance. A ship was chartered, whose homely name of *Fanny* seems to have been altered, for the occasion, to that of *Mountjoy*, the historic vessel that had broken the boom at Londonderry. She was loaded with 35,000 rifles—not of the wooden sort that had set the whole Liberal press in a roar, but of the best German pattern—and 3,000,000 cartridges. The affair was carried through without a hitch; the munitions were rushed to various appointed destinations along roads guarded by Covenanters; telegraphs and telephones were interrupted; the police and coastguards were powerless to interfere. Mr. Asquith, never at a loss for the impressive phrase, characterized the adventure as a grave and unprecedented outrage, but neither Mr. Asquith nor any other minister dared attempt to deprive the Covenanters of a single one of the smuggled rifles. The Government had now no thought but how to get out of this Ulster imbroglio with as little discredit as possible.

This was not so easy as it seemed. The sowing of dragon's teeth raises a crop that spreads with terrible rapidity. The proceedings of the Covenanters had been watched by their fellow-Irishmen with less of wrath than admiration. It was just what they had always wanted to do themselves, and if one army could be tolerated in Ireland, why not two? With extraordinary rapidity, during these pre-War months of 1914, a Catholic army was formed, whose numbers soon exceeded those of the Covenanters themselves. But it was not, like its rival, marshalled under the Union Jack and demonstrative of its loyalty to the Empire. For now, behind the comparatively moderate Nationalism of Mr. Redmond and his followers, was springing up a new and extreme form whose motto, *Sinn Féin*, or "ourselves alone," perfectly describes the spirit that was driving civiliza-

tion over the abyss. It was spreading like wildfire through the younger generation, and by the law of Irish gravitation it is always the most extreme element that comes to the top.

There was one man who, throughout the whole of this mad crisis, had succeeded in keeping his head. The position of George V was one of terrible difficulty. It would have been only too easy for him to have taken sides, openly, like the Peers, or covertly, like his own Grandmother, with one or other of the contending factions. His great and honourable endeavour was throughout—as it had been in the struggle over the Lords' Veto—to seek peace and ensue it. "Month after month," to quote the *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith*, "he persisted in his efforts to induce the irreconcilables to moderate their language, and to make generous allowance for each others' differences."<sup>1</sup> Sir Almeric Fitzroy, in his memoirs, tells an illuminating story of how, when one of the ministers happened to remark that he was going to have a tooth drawn, Asquith replied that he was in a similar plight, since he was going to see the King.<sup>2</sup> Yet never for a moment did the relations of King and Premier cease to be marked by mutual confidence and loyalty.

It was late in July, when the sands were fast running out, that the King, who had resisted every inducement to transgress the limits of constitutional propriety, came forward in his rôle of peacemaker, with a supreme effort to make the leaders of the contending parties come together, and arrange a settlement that should avert a fearful alternative. The Conference, which assembled at Buckingham Palace, was opened with a moving appeal by His Majesty in person. "The time," he pleaded, "is short. You will, I know, employ it to the fullest advantage and be patient, earnest and conciliatory."

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. II, p. 525.

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There were some Government partisans who were not ashamed to take their Sovereign to task, and even to hint at "serious consequences,"<sup>1</sup> but Asquith silenced them with such a snub as he knew on occasion how to deliver.

George V was no miracle worker, to cast out the devils of strife and unreason that had got possession of men's minds in these last days of peace. The issues at the Conference were narrowed down to the finest point of difference. The only real difficulty was what area of Ulster should be marked out for exclusion—the obvious device of a Boundary Commission seeming to have occurred to no one. It was as much as either Mr. Redmond's or Sir Edward Carson's life was worth to incur the guilt of treason to his followers by sacrificing either or both of the disputed counties, Tyrone and Fermanagh. And so the Conference broke down, though amid a fairly confident feeling that the red blood was not destined to flow, if only for the reason that there was now no conceivable means, that the Government dared employ, of coercing the Covenanters. The game was now in the hands of the Lords, who had it in their power to amend the amending Bill embodying Mr. Asquith's original proposals for a settlement, and confront the Government with the choice of accepting the Bill, so amended, or pass Home Rule in its original form and abide by the consequences. There could be little doubt what that choice would be.

But first blood was, after all, about to flow in the Irish Civil War. It was on July 26, the day after the Austrian Ambassador had left Belgrade, that the newly formed Nationalist army endeavoured to repeat, on a smaller scale, the gun-running exploit of the Covenanters. There was no secrecy about this performance, the guns being landed in the full light of noon, the volunteers being doubtless under

<sup>1</sup> *Annual Register*, 1914, p. 160.

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the impression that what had been sauce for the Protestant goose would be sauce for the Catholic gander. But a zealous police official took it on himself to requisition the aid of two companies of Scottish Borderers. After a scuffling affair, in which the police and soldiers were only partially successful in disarming the returning volunteers, the troops marched back to barracks pursued and pelted by a wildly excited Dublin mob. After about a quarter of the men had been more or less seriously injured, some of them appear to have lost patience and loosed off, without orders, into their tormentors, killing 3 and wounding 38. This "massacre," as it was called, aroused such fury throughout the length and breadth of Catholic Ireland, that the situation might easily have got out of the control of the politicians . . . but now, with dreadful swiftness, another situation was developing in which, for a season, even the long feud of Irishman against Englishman, and Irishman against Irishman, could be dwarfed to oblivion.

## CHAPTER VII

### OVER THE EDGE

With the conclusion of the Anglo-Russian Entente, signalized by the meeting of the Tsar and Edward VII at Reval, in 1908, the Armed Peace, that had brooded over Europe since the rape of the French provinces in 1871, entered on its last and deadliest phase. Owing to an almost incredible series of diplomatic blunders, under the auspices of Kaiser William II, the diplomatic edifice that Bismarck had raised with such care and skill lay in ruins. France, the unforgiving, had now emerged from the isolation to which it had been Bismarck's supreme object to relegate her. First the wire had been cut between Berlin and St. Petersburg, and the unnatural union consummated of Republic and Tsardom; next England had been driven into the Entente with France, and so thoroughly irritated and alarmed by the German naval challenge as to become, to all intents and purposes, the ally of France and Russia; finally Italy, still nominally the third partner in the Triple Alliance, had ceased to be an ally in anything but name. The *revanche* was no longer the mad gamble it would have been under Boulanger. If France could only succeed in bringing the might of the Slav, Latin and Anglo-Saxon communities simultaneously to bear upon the Central Powers, it could be undertaken with more than even chances of success. At the same time Germany saw a ring of steel closing round her, and with every succeeding year the odds were being weighted more heavily against her. Was not her best—perhaps her only—

chance to strike with overwhelming violence, at her own, and not her enemy's, selected moment?

All was now ready for the supreme trial of strength. Those about to die had entered the arena, and were walking round each other looking for an opening.

In this time of final tension, the personality of the Kaiser ceases to have the dominating influence it had possessed during the first twenty years of his reign. The glamour of Divine Right had been fatally tarnished by one of those scandals which, like that of the Diamond Necklace, are more fatal to dynasties than the loss of battles and provinces. The Kaiser's most intimate friend, Prince Eulenberg, turned out to have been the leader of such a cult as, in England, had come to be associated with the name of Oscar. It came to be whispered, and more than whispered, that the highest military and aristocratic circles were tainted in a way peculiarly repulsive to the mentality of modern civilized peoples, and though the Kaiser himself was guiltless of anything more disreputable than a fondness for barrack-room stories, he was defiled by the pitch he had touched. Besides, with that ill-fated *Daily Telegraph* interview, the cup of his indiscretions was at last filled. Even docile Germany would have no more of his excursions into amateur diplomacy; a public and most humiliating pledge was exacted from him to be guided henceforth by the advice of his ministers. From now onwards his neurotic self-assertion is only displayed by fits and starts, dangerous from their very infrequency.

Bülow, the master charlatan, did not long occupy Bismarck's seat after the eclipse of his master. But he remained long enough to score for Germany one of those victories on paper that are worse than defeats. In the autumn of 1908, Europe began to suffer from the first of those shocks that were like the prelude to the eruption of some long-dormant



volcano. Bismarck had prophesied, with that uncanny foresight of his, that the European war was coming—though not in his time—and that it would start in the Balkans. To those who had marked his words, it must have seemed ominous indeed that the old feud of Russia and Austria in the Balkans, that had been more or less patched up by the Treaty of Berlin, should have again been pushed to the forefront of international politics.

This is not the place to detail its course. The start is pure comedy—a Russian Foreign Minister lured into a friendly conspiracy with his Austrian rival at a castle in Bohemia, putting his hand to definite concessions in expectation of returns that were not so definitely guaranteed, finding himself promptly and ignominiously taken at his word with nothing to show for it, and henceforth in mortal terror lest his own written indiscretions should be produced and used against him. The Treaty of Berlin, that solemn compact to whose observance the honour of every one of the European Powers was pledged, was publicly torn to pieces by Austria for the sake of establishing a formal title to a couple of Jugo-Slav Provinces that, as a matter of fact, she had ruled for the last thirty years, and might have gone on ruling indefinitely. At the same time the low comedian of the piece, Ferdinand of Bulgaria, a rather offensive caricature of his Coburg kinsman, Edward VII, seized the opportunity to call himself Tsar instead of Prince, and to repudiate a certain insignificant tribute that was the last remnant of the old sovereignty of Moslem over Christian.

The sanctity of treaties found a strange defender in Serbia—or Servia as she was then called—the fiercest and least reputable of all the little nations that had escaped from the Turkish bondage. The ordinary Englishman scarcely knew of Serbia at all, and what he did know he had not liked. She was

principally concerned in his mind with a horrible incident that had startled the world five years before, in which a King and Queen had been done to death with every aggravation of brutality by a party of officers, who had been so little ashamed of the performance as to have been photographed in a group by way of a souvenir. The country was, in fact, honeycombed with secret societies, or, to put it frankly, murder clubs, for Serbian patriotism knew no limits of morality. Little did the ordinary Englishman dream that the ramifications of international diplomacy could bind him in such a way to the fortunes of Serbia as to cost the lives of a million of his countrymen.

For this was precisely what an Entente with Russia was destined to imply. A murder or two mattered little to St. Petersburg in comparison with the fact that the Serbs worshipped Christ according to the Orthodox rite. Serbia was Russia's protégé, and her ambition to unite all her Jugo-Slav kinsfolk under her sovereignty, as in the far-off days of Stephen Dushan, made her a convenient thorn in the side of Austria, to whom the realization of this dream would mean the disruption of her Empire, and within whose confines the Black Hand of Serbian patriotism was already at work. Rather than suffer the annexation of the two kindred provinces, Serbia would fight—at any rate, if she could get Russia to back her.

But Austria too had her backer. Germany had sacrificed all her other friendships; Russia had gone; England had been driven away; in Italy was no trust for to trust in—only Austria was left, and to the Austrian alliance Germany clung with a drowning man's grip. However wild and reckless might be the statesmanship of Vienna, there could be no question of faltering in what Bülow had called Germany's "Niebelungen troth" to the House of

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Hapsburg. She was in the position of one who has given a book of blank cheques to a poor but spendthrift relation. And the chief of the Austrian General Staff, Conrad von Hoetzendorff, happened to be an intransigent militarist, who was straining at the leash to get at Serbia and end that menace once and for all—if it meant a European conflict, so much the better, according to Conrad's calculations, before Russia had had time to put her house in order.

Conrad was right, to the extent that Russia dared not fight. Even her French ally had no stomach for the contest—as yet. As for England, the Triple Entente was yet in its infancy, and it was doubtful whether, under a Liberal Government, she could be brought into line for a war arising out of a Balkan quarrel in which not one Englishman in ten thousand had the faintest interest. It was just the opportunity for such a superficial talent as that of Bülow to show to the fullest advantage. Germany proceeded to take the trick by presenting what was practically an ultimatum at St. Petersburg. Russia must give way unconditionally or the legions of Conrad would be unleashed against Serbia. Russia, faced with ruin, pocketed her pride and induced the Serbs to draw in their horns.

The Central Powers had scored, and the Kaiser did not fail to rub it in with all the resources of his flamboyant imagination. He saw and proclaimed himself as having appeared in shining armour at the side of his venerable ally. The Triple Entente had been tested and found wanting. But what, on a final balance, had been won or lost? Austria's blank cheque had been cashed in the sham coinage of diplomacy; of solid gains she had nothing. The Serbian menace was in no way diminished—the work of intrigue and conspiracy went forward as actively as ever. Russia was humbled indeed, but

into unforgiving resentment—even her fish-blooded Tsar, as is the way with mild men when they are driven beyond a certain point, had registered a silent determination that this time should be the last. And the members of the Triple Entente, now fully advertised of Germany's intention to drive them apart, began, by a natural reaction, to draw closer together.

Serbia, to which England, as a decent country, had felt herself unable, but a few years previously, to accord the honours of diplomatic intercourse, was now the apex upon which the whole crazy pyramid of European security had come to rest. No matter what provocation she might give, not an Austrian soldier must cross her frontier nor an Austrian gun be fired against her capital. The train had been laid—let but the match be applied and the fire of war would run from one nation to another, licking up the heritage of civilization. The gods must have been in an ironic mood when they allowed mankind to commit its destinies to the black and secret hand of Serbian patriotism.

In 1911 came the second of these premonitory shocks. The business of Morocco had at last come to a head. The settlement, that had been the outcome of so much haggling and intriguing at the Conference of Algeiras, had, in the event, proved to be a complete sham. Nobody, probably, had ever expected it to settle anything, and least of all France. The new police force with its Swiss chief never got going, but the process of rounding off the French Empire went steadily on according to the technique of African grab. The usual incidents occurred—unsympathetic people suggested that they were made to occur—that compelled the civilizing power, with a reluctance as sincere as that of the Walrus for absorbing oysters, to take action. There was the bombardment of a port—of course for

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excellent reasons ; a transitory Sultan deposed by a still more transitory pretender ; fears for the safety of Europeans in the capital, Fez ; a military expedition coming chivalrously to the rescue, and showing every disposition to stay put.

Thus, from Germany's point of view, the result of her threatenings, negotiations, and painfully extorted safeguards, was that France had quietly gone on to possess herself of Morocco, and the Act of Algeciras was so much waste-paper. What was to be done ? The principle of compensation came into play, which means that if a rival grabs anything anywhere, you, if you are strong enough, must be allowed to grab something, from him or from third parties, at least its equivalent. As France could, for the moment, offer nobody else's property, she must be prepared to give up some of her own for peaceful possession of her new conquest. It was Germany's proposition that she should be allowed to take over France's Congo Colony—no very disastrous change for the inhabitants, as France's record of oppression in the Congo was only a degree better than that of Belgium. But then, in the apportionment of Naboth's vineyard, the last thing to be considered is the interest of Naboth.

The Kaiser's experience of Tangier had not cured Germany of her love for dramatic coups. France, as the Power in possession, had every interest in prolonging the haggle till doomsday, if some means could not be found of speeding it up. If the French could play the game of protecting nationals, why not the Germans ? There was an excellent harbour in the south part of Morocco, called Agadir, a deserted stretch of beach and palm trees, but one on which Germany suddenly discovered that she had interests to defend. Into this harbour accordingly, under the glare of a July sun, steamed a lean and rakish craft, diminutive as warships go, with the black cross of

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the German Navy flying at her stern, and lay at anchor. The next day, as a few interested Moslems may have noted and the German naval archives record, she had shifted her place of anchorage slightly.

This was the event that came within an ace of setting the civilized world in a blaze. It amounted to a hint, Teutonic in its lack of delicacy, that France was expected to do business, and do it quickly, over this affair of compensation. The haggle accordingly began, one side demanding much more and the other offering much less to start with than any practicable bargaining figure. English public opinion was greatly excited. Germany was now the enemy, and any unusual action that Germany might take was assumed to have some sinister purpose behind it. The possibility of the Kaiser acquiring a naval base in North-West Africa was discovered to be fraught with dire menace to British naval supremacy. It was England's duty to back France in those designs on Morocco of which she had formerly disapproved—though as a matter of fact it seems to have been at one time in the mind of the French Premier, Caillaux, to buy off Germany with a bargain by which his ally would have been left out in the cold.

The negotiations dragged on behind closed doors amid the heat of a sweltering July, until, on the 21st, Europe was startled by another dramatic stroke, this time from England. Mr. Lloyd George, hitherto believed to be an extreme pacifist, took advantage of a dinner of not too friendly financiers to sandwich into his speech a flamboyant challenge to Germany, which, when stripped of its oratorical trappings, amounted to a plain declaration that if there were a war over this Agadir business, England would come in on the side of France. Through the mouth of her Chancellor, England had thus intervened in the Morocco crisis precisely as Germany had done, little more than two years previously, in that of the

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Balkans. She had appeared in shining armour at France's side—had assumed the part of brilliant second.

Looking back on it in the light of innumerable documents, it is difficult to discover any necessity for the launching of this bombshell. There was as yet no reason to believe that Germany intended to put all to the touch for a few thousand square miles, more or less, of desert and primeval forest. The effect of the speech was to make any concession on her part a public humiliation, and to arouse her already rampant Chauvinism to fever pitch. There followed a period of acute tension of which the British public had only the vaguest inkling. The German fleet was in full strength off Norway—significantly well placed for such a sudden coup as the Japanese had brought off, in 1904, at Port Arthur. Though army manœuvres were abandoned, leave was stopped. There was a panic on the Berlin Stock Exchange. . . .

And then, as summer waned to autumn, the tension silently relaxed. The haggle was destined, after all, to end in a deal, and Germany, if she could not get the whole of the Congo Province, must content herself with as fat a slice of it as she could get out of the hardest bargainers in Europe. So France settled down to impose her doubtless beneficent yoke on the descendants of the Barbary corsairs, while Germany proceeded to take a three years' possession of such niggers, gorillas, and rubber trees as fate had assigned her. And the little warship in the bay got up steam, and, doubtless to the relief of her ship's company, was soon a disappearing trail of smoke on the broad Atlantic.<sup>1</sup>

The matter did not end here. For observe with

<sup>1</sup> There had, in fact, been three ships altogether, relieving each other at Agadir—but always one, and sometimes two, in the anchorage.

what tragic inevitability the supreme catastrophe was being led on. Just such a humiliation had been inflicted on Germany in 1911 as she herself had inflicted on Russia in 1909. From a material standpoint, indeed, she had done reasonably well for herself, but a glove had been flung at her feet which she had neglected to take up. It was time for her now, by the rules of the game, to assert herself against England in some equally dramatic way, and this took the appropriate form of an additional Naval Law. More Dreadnoughts, more sailors, more money to be wrung from the taxpayer! It was just at this moment that Lord Chancellor Haldane, the minister who had spoken of Germany as his spiritual home, came to Berlin to see if reason could not call a halt to the competition in suicide . . . they handed him the text of the new law, but he, not realizing its importance, put the complex document aside, to be examined at leisure. There was no way out for England, except by repudiating the Entente—and then only a quite insignificant slackening in the construction of that fleet on which the Kaiser and Tirpitz had set their hearts.

What was England to do? With this ever-growing menace from the East—and at the Admiralty, at least, it was remembered what searchings of heart there had been when the High Seas Fleet had been reported, at Agadir time, somewhere off the Norwegian coast—it was necessary to have every available ship concentrated for the decisive action that might well precede a formal declaration of war. Even the Fisher concentration in the North Sea was not enough. England could not afford any considerable force for what had once been her main area of concentration, the Mediterranean. And yet Germany's Austrian ally had, at Germany's instigation, begun to provide herself with a Dreadnought fleet, that must be contained in the Adriatic. Was England



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to burden her already strained finances by providing another fleet in addition to the Grand Fleet? The Liberal little navy men, and Mr. Lloyd George, who was known to be trying to cut down expenditure on the navy, would have something to say to that. There was one plain way out of the difficulty. Let England frankly concentrate her striking force in the North Sea, and let the French fleet, that was amply sufficient for the purpose, do the same in the Mediterranean. This would involve leaving the Channel coast of France with no other guard than that of the British fleet.

So it was arranged, and so it was done. It is amazing that even now ministers could go on talking as if England's hands were equally free to support France or to refrain, if war should break out between her and Germany. If there was such a thing as international honour, it was certain that England's was pledged to the hilt to bar the gates of the North Sea against any hostile action that Germany might undertake. And this could be achieved by no means short of war. France had taken thirty years to forgive England for having stood by to see her crushed in 1870—and yet England had not even had an Entente with her in those days. But now—if England, having encouraged her to uncover her flank, had allowed her to be stabbed, who can doubt that she would have made any terms with the open foe so that she might have joined forces with him in crushing the perfidious friend? The Triple Entente was more firmly cemented, in fact, than the Triple Alliance, one of whose members was already determined to repudiate its obligations.

It says much for the fear that held all nations alike from the final step over the abyss, that for three whole years after the Agadir crisis, the Powers of Europe, armed to the teeth and marshalled for the combat, kept from each others' throats. The history

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of these years reads like that of a nightmare. First Italy, without the shadow of pretext or quarrel, fell upon Turkey's last remaining African province of Tripoli, and her army soon distinguished itself by a hideous massacre of the civilian population in one of the coast towns to which it had extended its civilizing attentions. Of course, there could be no question of England taking any action to restrain her—it was all-important that the doubtful member of the Alliance should be coaxed and courted by the Entente. The danger to Italy was from her own ally, Austria, for the ferocious Conrad would have taken a leaf out of her book by falling upon her there and then, while part of her forces were in Africa. There was just enough of sanity, or decency, left at Vienna, to procure Conrad's dismissal from the headship of the General Staff. He was not to remain unemployed for long.

The example set by Italy was next followed by Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro, who, secretly encouraged by Russia, suspended their mutual vendettas in order to strip an obviously enfeebled Turkey of her European possessions. This was accomplished with a success that took the world completely by surprise, the Turk being left with no more than an insignificant corner of European territory covering Constantinople. This was highly displeasing to Austria, by whom any aggrandisement of Serbia was felt as a menace. It was with difficulty that she could be restrained from precipitating the general war by launching an attack on her troublesome neighbour, but Germany did, on this occasion, hold her ally back. Austria, however, succeeded in causing another Balkan war, by keeping Serbia from her agreed portion in the share-out of the Turk's effects. This started a dispute which Bulgaria tried to resolve by a treacherous attack on the rest of the gang, whereupon Rumania, that had

hitherto kept aloof, fell upon her from behind in order to appropriate a coveted strip of territory, while the Turk took advantage of the general confusion to resume possession of his recently lost fortress city of Adrianople.

And yet even this wild conflagration in the Balkans was, somehow, prevented from spreading beyond them. For months Russia and Austria stood glaring at each other, ready to spring, but the other Powers showed an unexpected capacity of working together for peace, and Germany made it clear that even her liability for the military ventures of the Dual Monarchy was not unlimited. Nothing, in fact, is more remarkable than the improvement in Anglo-German relations on the very eve of their rupture. It seemed as if there were at last a real goodwill for the settlement of outstanding differences. Friendly co-operation, once tried with success, might easily become a habit. The new German ambassador, Lichnowsky, was a sincere, almost a passionate, friend of England and peace; the Foreign Secretary, Jagow, was a quiet man of conciliatory manners; the Chancellor, Bethmann Hollweg, a promoted official, was, though an abysmal nonentity, a good man, honestly anxious to seek peace and ensue it. Even the Chief of the General Staff, who ironically enough bore the name of Moltke, was no fire-eater, like Conrad, but a peace-lover, if for no better reason than that, unlike Conrad, he was conscious of his utter inadequacy to the task to which fate and his Kaiser had called him.

But the sledge of civilization, sliding downhill, had now acquired a momentum quite beyond the power of such nerveless hands to arrest. During this last Balkan crisis European War had been staved off by a miracle, but the situation afterwards was even worse than before. The race of armaments was now speeded up to such a killing pace that it would soon be a choice between war and bankruptcy.

Germany, not content with her new navy law, proceeded to effect a corresponding increase in her already enormous army, with a capital levy to finance it. France answered the challenge by extending her period of compulsory service with the colours from two years to three. Russia was hurrying on—as fast as anything Russian could be hurried—her network of strategic railways in Poland. In England, Mr. Winston Churchill, as the strong man of the Cabinet, had gone to the Admiralty in order to key up the navy to the highest pitch of efficiency, and to make it clear that even a Liberal Government would shrink from no expense in safeguarding England's lordship of the waves. And now the Empire, or part of it, was beginning to help the Mother Country in providing for the common safety. Australia and New Zealand each contributed a battle cruiser, and the Straits Settlements a Dreadnought battleship. The Canadian Premier came forward with a scheme for providing no less than three Dreadnoughts, and a moving scene was witnessed of the whole Canadian Parliament rising and singing the National Anthem. As, however, the Canadian parties could not agree among themselves whether the three ships should be merged in the British Navy, or form the nucleus of a Dominion Navy, the difficulty was got over by the compromise of not providing them at all.

Meanwhile the Serbs, who now, after more than half a millennium, had got even with the Turk for their national humiliation on the field of Kossovo, or Blackbirds, and who were conscious of having Russia to back them, redoubled their intrigues for undermining the loyalty to Francis Joseph of his Jugo-Slav subjects. Conrad was now back at the General Staff, as fiercely determined as ever to destroy this nest of vipers at the first opportunity. The Austrian Foreign Minister was the dapper Count Berchtold, too frivolous, in his Viennese way, to

## OVER THE EDGE

count the risks of any gamble, even with armies for counters.

It was just after midsummer 1914 that the eupeptic, unlovable man, of whom we had a passing glimpse at Queen Victoria's funeral, and who was heir to the Austrian throne, went in state to the capital of that same Bosnia, whose recent and unforgiven annexation had goaded Serbia to the verge of war. It was characteristic of him to choose for this visit—the first that any Hapsburg had dared pay to this remote half-Oriental town—the sacred anniversary of Kossovo. Serbian patriotism had one way of dealing with such an insult. Serajevo swarmed with the emissaries of the Black Hand. One of these—a consumptive young man who has since been formally admitted, by a commemorative tablet, to the pantheon of his country's heroes—shot the Archduke dead in his carriage, and following the precedent of Serbian regicide, performed the same office for his morganatic consort, who, poor thing, was enjoying the proudest day of her life in being received, for the first time, with the full honours of royalty.

The train was lit—nothing could stop the fire from setting the world ablaze but a wisdom and restraint that were far to seek in reckless Berchtold and bull-witted Conrad. Perhaps Germany might have exercised a restraining influence—but the Kaiser at this critical moment was stricken by a brain-storm of indignation, that made him blind to any other consideration but that of stamping out a nest of regicides. The counsellors who stood before his face could do no more than let matters drift. And so the Austrians, after nearly a month's delay—for Berchtold had not the wit nor Conrad the capacity to strike in the first hot flush of European indignation—launched the ultimatum that meant World War.

The rules of the skin game were inexorable. It would be unthinkable for Russia, once humiliated,

to stand by and see her protégé crushed. It would be unthinkable for Germany to let Russia mobilize without instantly mobilizing herself; to mobilize against Russia meant attacking France; to attack France meant to march, burning and destroying, through the cities of neutralized Belgium—for Moltke knew no other way of getting his machine to work. All this, with the logic of a mathematical proposition, as the result of a pistol-shot and the spirit of twentieth-century Europe!

And England? For her, no more than the rest, was there any loophole of escape. She had tied herself to a stake from which she could not fly—bearlike she too must fight the course. Well might George V, on the launching of a British ultimatum to Germany, throw up hands of despair and cry to the American ambassador, “My God, Mr. Page, what else could we do?”

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